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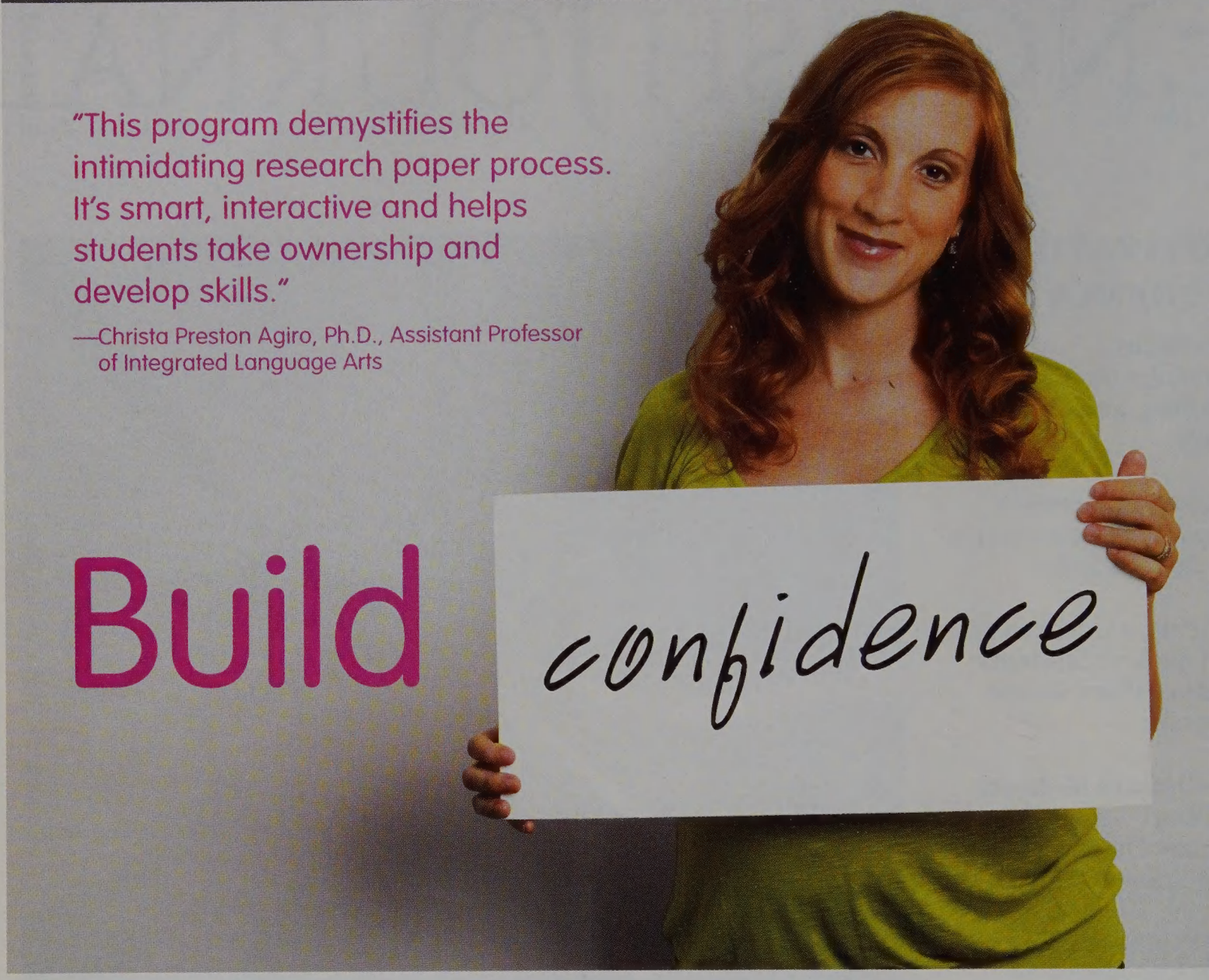

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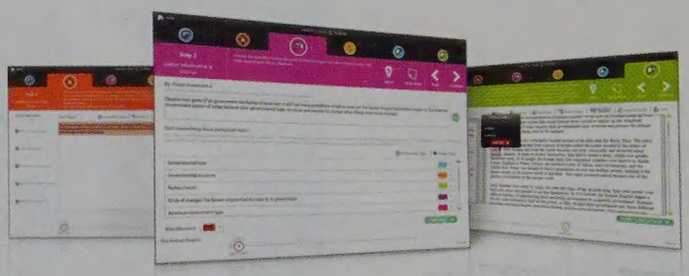

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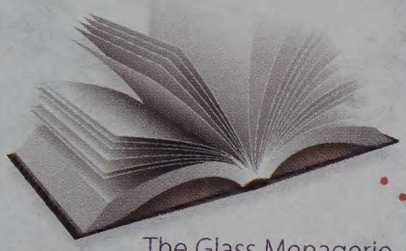

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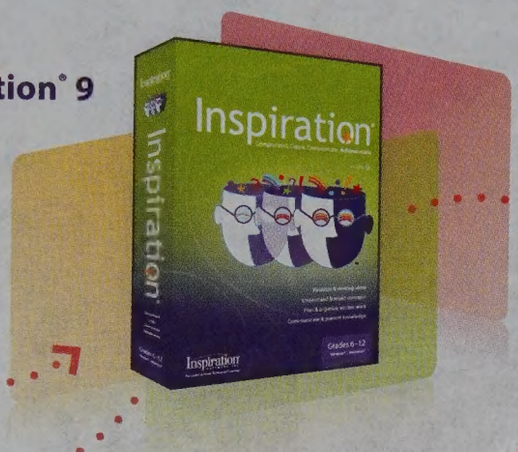

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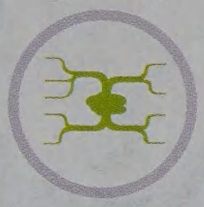

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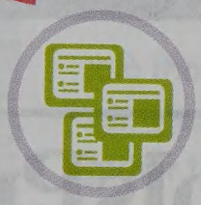

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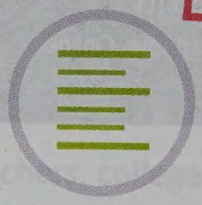

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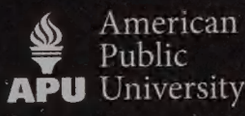
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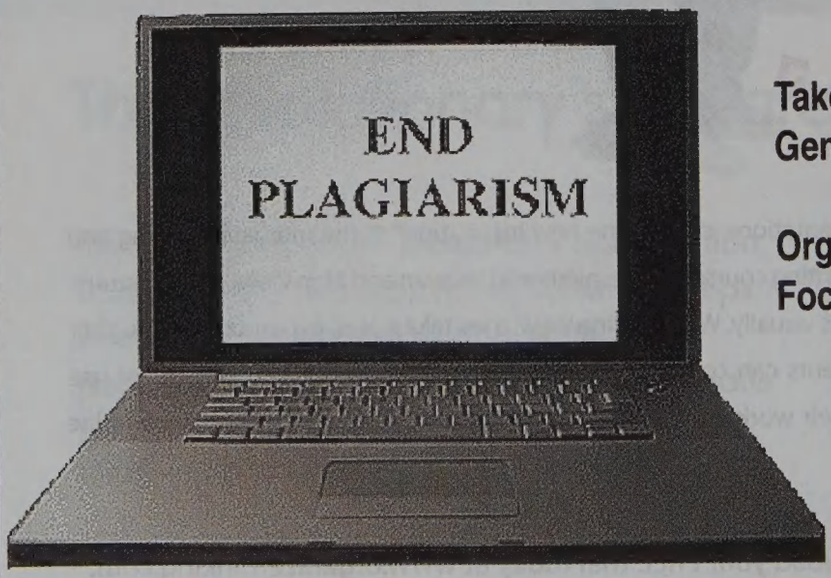

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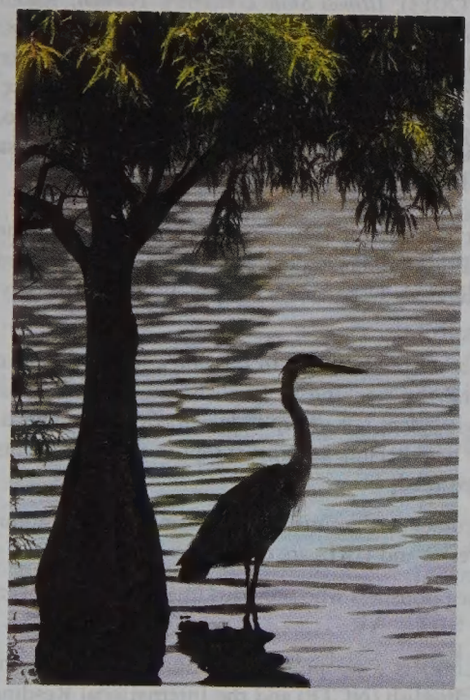

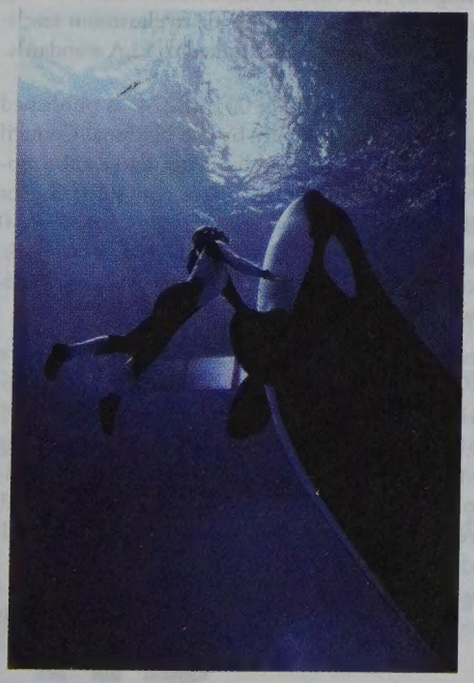

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Manuscripts Detailed information about manuscript submission can be found on the Call for Manuscripts page in this issue. Editorial correspondence should be directed to *English Journal,* Ken Lindblom, Editor, English Department, Stony Brook University, English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu.

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- Manuscripts should be sent by email as an attachment to English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with standard margins. Word 2000 or later is preferred. Authors using Macintosh software should save their work as Word for Windows. **Paper submissions should be sent only when email is impossible.** Please save copies of anything you send us. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 10 to 15 double-spaced, typed pages in length (approximately 2,500 to 3,750 words).
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English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by two or more outside reviewers. We will attempt to reach a decision on each article within five months. The decision on pieces submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

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Ethics in the English Classroom
Deadline: November 15, 2010
Publication Date: July 2011

Ethics is possibly the most challenging topic taken up in English courses. What is an English teacher's proper role in helping students to become good, ethical adults? What is an English teacher's responsibility for taking up important, but controversial, subjects? What literature and writing assignments have you found helpful in raising ethical dilemmas and instructing students in effective ways of resolving them? How have you helped students to value—and effectively engage in—intelligent discussion over close-minded arguments? What have you learned from character education that has benefitted your teaching? How has your teaching of ethics changed over the years as laws, community mores, and technology have affected the world? How do we (or should we) keep our personal beliefs from affecting what and how we teach? What do you do when you disagree with your students, their parents, your administrators, or the community on ethical issues that you believe have an important bearing on your classroom? What ethical compromises have you felt forced to make as a teacher? What can we do to help students learn how and when to respect the different beliefs of others? How do you help students develop intelligent, ethical stances without telling them what to think? What classroom activities have you used to build students' abilities to work well with others? For this issue, we welcome a wide variety of articles addressing ethics in English class.

The NCTE Centennial Celebration: Reading the Past, Writing the Future
Publication Date: September 2011
Guest Editor: Leila Christenbury, Virginia Commonwealth University

The National Council of Teachers of English turns 100! Chair of the Task Force for Council History and 2011 Leila Christenbury will commission essays to commemorate a century of literacy education. No unsolicited submissions will be considered for this special issue. The 100th anniversary of *English Journal* will be celebrated in the January 2012 issue, which will appear exactly 100 years after the first *EJ* was published.

Students Reading and Writing for Their Own Purposes
Deadline: March 15, 2011
Publication Date: November 2011

One of the unique aspects of English language arts is that its focus on developing literacy skills allows teachers to integrate students' personal interests and goals directly into the curriculum. In fact, NCTE's Learning Standard 12 is about just that: "Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)." As important as helping students to develop an inclination and ability to use their literacy skills for their own purposes is, some would argue it's among the least emphasized of the twelve NCTE Standards. This standard is not easily assessed, nor do prepackaged curricula generally accommodate students' individual goals and interests. To raise awareness of and share strategies for fulfilling this important standard, the November 2011 *English Journal* is devoted to the ways in which teachers can and should incorporate students' purposes in English classes.

How have you creatively integrated students' personal goals and desires into your reading and writing assignments? What methods have you developed for soliciting students' individual interests and helping students to advance them in ways appropriate to English language arts? How have you helped students understand that literacy can help them achieve their own goals? What is the effect on the quality of student work of incorporating students' purposes into your curriculum? How have you connected students with people and organizations outside your classroom: in the larger school, the community, national and regional organizations, online communities, and so on? How have media and Web 2.0 technologies enhanced your ability to engage students personally in ELA? Any article addressing the ways in which students' own purposes may be highlighted in English class is welcome for this issue.

General Interest
May submit any time

We publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles foreground classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

Ongoing Features

Speaking My Mind: We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear with your photo in a future issue of *English Journal*. We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects.

Student Voices: This is a forum for students to share their experiences and recommendations in short pieces of 300 words. Teachers are encouraged to submit the best responses from their classes, not whole class sets, please. Individual students are welcome to submit as well. Topics are as follows:

- How (if at all) should an English class help you become an ethical person? (Deadline: November 15, 2010)
- How and when has an English assignment allowed you to write, read, or present something that was truly important to you? (Deadline: March 15, 2011)

Teacher to Teacher: This is a forum for teachers to share ideas, materials, and activities in short pieces of 300 words. Topics are as follows:

- What important ethical dilemmas do English teachers currently face? (Deadline: November 15, 2010)
- What unusual personal purpose has a student been able to fulfill as part of your English class? (Deadline: March 15, 2011)

Original Photography

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be sent as 8" × 10" black-and-white glossies or as an electronic file in a standard image format at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer's name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

Original Cartoons

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. Line drawings in black ink should be submitted on $8^1/_2$" × 11" unlined paper and be signed by the artist.

Columns and Column Editors

Challenging Texts
Editor: P. L. Thomas

Franz Kafka proclaimed that a "book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." The authors and texts we bring into our classrooms and the acts of literacy that students perform about and because of those texts are essential aspects of creating classrooms where students become critical readers and critical writers. This column will explore the authors and texts we choose that confront the world and the worldviews of students. We also explore various theoretical approaches to literature that challenge and energize students and teachers.

Contributors should explore and share their classroom practices that address questions such as, What authors and texts confront the world and students' assumptions? What texts expand students' perceptions of and assumptions about genre? What texts confront both big ideas and the art and craft of writing? How does critical pedagogy look in literature classrooms? What literary theories do you find most generative?

Submit an electronic Word file attached to your email to the column editor, P. L. Thomas, at paul.thomas@furman.edu. Contributors are encouraged to query the column editor and share drafts of column ideas as part of the submission process.

Mentoring Matters
Editor: Thomas M. McCann

Some critics use the disturbing phrase "eating their young" to refer to the way some school leaders and veteran teachers treat new teachers. The image refers to the regrettable practice of allowing the newcomer to endure the least desirable conditions in a school or department. In contrast, caring veteran teachers will be sensitive to the need to foster growth and to promote a sense of self-efficacy in new colleagues. The development of any teacher is not complete after departure from a teacher preparation program. Professional growth continues for years, and supportive colleagues can play a significant role in influencing the development, satisfaction, and retention of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This column invites contributors to offer practicing teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs their insights about how to mentor and support early-career English teachers, including reports from early-career teachers about their positive mentoring experiences. We especially encourage specific suggestions for practices that will help veteran teachers to support newer colleagues in developing positive relationships with students, contending with pressures to conform to test-driven curricula, handling an enormous workload, and forming collaborative relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and parents.

We invite column contributions of 500–1,500 words addressing themes about mentoring and supporting early-career teachers. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Thomas M. McCann at tmccann1@niu.edu.

Off the Shelves
Editor: Mark Letcher

We are living in a new golden age of young adult literature. Edgy and engaging titles by authors both emerging and established have been pushing the field of young adult literature (YAL) to places we've never seen before. Teen readers are seeing more innovative formats and genre-blending in their reading, are exposed to authors from around the world, and are blurring the lines between previously established "teen" and "adult" fiction.

There may be no better time to celebrate and promote the diversity, characters, issues, and pure literary craftsmanship that YAL offers its audience, and our hope is that you will help us contribute to the conversation.

This column will explore a wide range of topics related to literature written for and/or read by young adults, with a strong emphasis on recently published works. We particularly welcome the voices and experiences of secondary teachers, for whom YAL provides vital classroom reading, suggestions for eager and reluctant students, and engaging personal reading material.

Submissions of 500–1,500 words, inquiries, and suggestions for future column topics should be directed to Mark Letcher at markeletcher@gmail.com.

Poetry
Editor: Anne McCrary Sullivan

In her poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," Naomi Shihab Nye reminds us that "poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes, / they are sleeping." Look inside your shoes, your desk drawers and kitchen cabinets, the hallways of your school, the grocery

stores and garbage dumps of your community. "Find" some poems and send them to *EJ*. Choose those that seem a fit, either explicitly or implicitly, with announced themes of upcoming *EJ* issues. We are looking for well-crafted original poems in any style, serious or humorous, written by teachers, students, or those who love them. We do not consider previously published poems or simultaneous submissions.

Send by email attachment, for blind review, up to five poems with only phone number and initials on the page. In your email message, include brief biographical information. Poets whose work is published will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Send submissions to EJPoetry@nl.edu. Send correspondence to Anne McCrary Sullivan at ASullivan@nl.edu.

Professional Writing in the English Language Arts Classroom

Editors: Jonathan Bush and Leah Zuidema

Professional writing in the English classroom is rich with possibilities. Students can learn to attend carefully to audience, purpose, and situation through all genres of writing, but these rhetorical concerns are especially relevant in professional writing contexts. This column focuses on the teaching of professional writing—writing that solves day-to-day problems, accomplishes work, and enables changes in organizations and communities. Professional writing instruction involves much more than teaching memos, proposals, or résumés; it can also be a way to teach for engaged, ethical citizenship. It encompasses ideas consistent with best practices in our discipline—allowing students to think creatively and critically within complex rhetorical situations. It values multiple genres, textual conventions, and visual design. Through professional writing, students can address real issues (big or small) and work to effect change by writing to authentic audiences.

Professional writing can be combined with other, more traditional studies of writing, literature, and language. This column helps readers who seek to teach professional writing concepts and to expand their teaching to include new projects and genres. We welcome contributions from those who teach professional writing as well as those who see echoes of professional writing concepts in their other work with writing, literature, and language. Please send inquiries, submissions of 500–1,500 words, or suggestions for future column topics to Jonathan Bush at jbush@wmich.edu or Leah Zuidema at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom

Editor: Julie Gorlewski

Research provides a lens through which teachers can better understand our pedagogical successes and failures. Research illuminates the social and political contexts of education, enhancing our appreciation of students, their families, and the communities we serve. The principles of research offer a foundation for reflective practice.

Classrooms are laboratories for teaching and learning. In this era of accountability, it is important for teachers to apply research to practice. We must be collaborators in the process of deciding what works, not merely consumers of products deemed "research-based." In the spirit of a critical theoretical approach, this column will seek both to clarify and to problematize research-based practices.

Submissions for this column might include an informal mini-study or a story about an attempt—successful or not—to conduct classroom research. Contributors should focus on a classroom application of professional scholarship by considering these questions: What worked (and didn't work) in my classroom? Why? How do I know? Also welcome are short reviews of recently published books that contributors believe can enhance teachers' classroom research practices. Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words.

Authors, especially new contributors, are encouraged to submit ideas for columns. Send inquiries or submissions to gorlewsj@newpaltz.edu.

Success with ELLs

Editor: Margo DelliCarpini

English educators face increasing linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In fact, enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in the nation's public schools between the years 1990 and 2000 grew by 105%, compared to a 12% overall growth rate among the general school population. ELLs enter our classrooms with a variety of prior school experiences, cultural expectations, and literacy experiences. Making the English language arts curriculum accessible to ELLs can pose unique challenges. However, when teachers implement strategies that target the needs of ELLs, all students can benefit.

This column will be a place where classroom teachers can find helpful ideas for teaching ELLs. Please submit manuscripts regarding challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream English classes and how you have developed innovative strategies to address their needs while enhancing the learning environment for all learners. Please share materials and practices that you have found to be especially effective for your ELLs, reports of successful collaborative instruction, motivational strategies that you use, and ways you connect content to ELLs' lives. Secondary-level English teachers are especially encouraged to submit their ideas. New authors who have ideas for columns that need development are encouraged to contact the editor. Send ideas or complete submissions of 500–1,500 words to Margo DelliCarpini at margo.dellicarpini@lehman.cuny.edu.

Teaching Young Adult Literature

Editor: Mike Roberts

As English teachers, we are constantly faced with the challenge of teaching literature that is both thought-provoking *and* entertaining. With today's YA literature better than ever, now is the time to help students discover the joy—and sometimes the pain—that comes with reading a great book. YA literature can provide students with a chance to engage in reading that is meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable. Plus, YA literature can inspire energized discussions about topics students feel passionate about.

This column will explore *teaching ideas and strategies* for some of today's newest and most popular young adult literature. This is not a column that reviews literature; it describes effective ways of *teaching* young adult literature. We encourage submissions of 1,800–2,500 words that focus on effective ways of incorporating YA literature into the curriculum. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Mike Roberts at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

From the Editor

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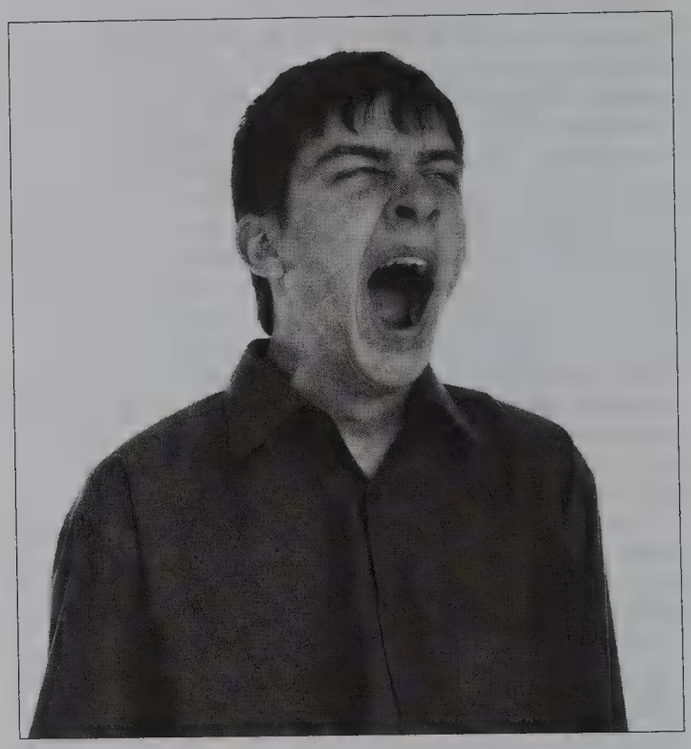
Motivating Students

In Jack Finney's short story, "Contents of the Dead Man's Pockets," Tom Benecke clings desperately to the side of a tall building from a thin ledge, imagining himself being found after his fall and wondering what the police would make of him from what they find in his pockets. I had spent the entire weekend composing a lecture on death images in the story. The students would be excited, I knew, because I had learned in my educational psychology course that adolescents were interested in death, and I had used my well-honed talents for symbol-hunting to uncover a plethora of death allusions in the story. It was early in my first year of teaching, and I leapt into that Monday morning's lesson with confident excitement.

I began my treatise by drawing a crude human skull on the chalkboard and asking the tenth graders what this image brought to mind. "Death," came the answer at once from the rows of students before me. They had gotten the answer right. I was off to a great start.

About 15 minutes in, I was on to the sixth or seventh death symbol and had about the same number to go. I was fascinated. I discussed the detailed intricacies of each allusion, pointing out how together they built—crescendoed imagistically—to the ultimate doom of the story's narrator. I had hoped at some point a student might interrupt my discourse to point out that the narrator does not die, at which time I would reveal the story's crowning literary achievement: irony.

A student did interrupt, but he didn't mention anything about the story. In fact, he didn't say anything at all. Instead, Paul—sitting all the way in the back of the classroom—opened his mouth wide enough to park a Volkswagen Beetle. Out of this gorge came a yawn so loud and so uninhibited that I was stunned. It must have lasted 30 seconds. The inhale was so strong, I was tempted to stick my arms out, crucifixion style, so they'd get caught in the corners of his mouth and keep me from being sucked in. Paul's yawning exhale, like a death rattle, tolled the end of my brilliant-lecture fantasy.



This is not a sign that you're giving a brilliant lecture.

I wanted to be mad at Paul, but his stark, human response to my lesson snagged my attention like a fishing hook. Its meaning was clear to me and to every student in the room. I had no retort. The yawn was the most insightful utterance made in that class. "Contents of the Dead Man's Pockets" did result in a death that day, after all: the death of a ridiculously misguided pedagogy.

I was crushed that day. As a seasoned teacher educator now, I can look back on the enthusiastic but naive teacher I was and be sympathetic. But I also think back fondly to that experience because, with the benefit of hindsight, I know it was probably the most important moment of my early career. Paul forced me to confront the utter failure of my approach. The one thing I did do right that day was listen to him. I guess it was an "out of the mouths of babes" moment, literally.

Thanks to the great mentors I had in my first year of teaching, I immersed myself in phenomenally helpful texts by Peter Elbow, Nancie Atwell, Robert Probst, Robert E. Slavin, and others. I learned a great deal about writing processes, reading/writing workshops, reader response, cooperative learning, and other student-centered methods for teaching—and in my first year of teaching I was *ready* to learn from them. It may be true that teachers can't really motivate students, but we sure can unmotivate them. These educators helped me create assignments that would tap into students' interests and abilities to engage them in literacy, instead of performing literacy at students and expecting it to spread.

As soon as I became editor of *English Journal,* I knew I wanted to devote an issue to this important concept in education that I learned in theory from textbooks, but in practice from a young wag's yawn. You'd be reading an issue on something else right now if Paul had covered his mouth.

We received many excellent submissions for this issue—many more than we could fit—and we have published articles that represent a range of important works on motivating students. Readers will find essays on creating motivating environments, designing meaningful tasks that will engage students, using film and film production to build students' literacy skills, and using technology to invigorate students, among other topics.

I'm delighted that Alfie Kohn accepted our invitation to author the "*EJ* in Focus" for this issue, and readers will be challenged and informed by his article, which champions student choice and is written with Kohn's infamous wit.

I selected the cover photo for this issue because the imagery of a ladder leading to a rooftop reminds me of our job as teachers. As Vygotsky has taught us, we build the scaffolds for students and they choose when and how quickly to climb them. The closer we can align our scaffolds to students' needs and interests, the more likely they are to climb as ably and quickly as they can. For them, the climb can be daunting or arduous or simply unappealing; it's our task to help them find the climb worthwhile. Once the students reach the rooftop, my metaphor breaks down. The students must find new ladders to climb and once they leave school, they should be prepared to find their own mentors.

The skills and abilities students can learn in English language arts can take them almost anywhere they want to go. Who knows what rooftops they'll climb, what heights they'll reach. And as effective writers, readers, speakers, and listeners, their impact on the world will be measured by so much more than just the contents of their pockets.

EJ at 100

This issue begins our 100th volume. The National Council of Teachers of English was founded in December 1911, and the first issue of its original journal, *English Journal,* was published in January 1912. To link the commemoration of *EJ* with the 100th anniversary of NCTE to be celebrated at the 2011 Annual Convention (and to retain historical accuracy), we have decided to mark the 100th year of *English Journal* officially with the January 2012 issue. The September 2011 issue will celebrate the NCTE Centennial and will be guest edited by Leila Christenbury, former *English Journal* editor and Chair, Task Force for Council History and 2011.

NCTE READING THE PAST. WRITING THE FUTURE. 100 YEARS

Turning on the Light

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In mid-January, the way my pants fit told me that I had overindulged during the holiday season. I was definitely motivated to do something about the situation, so I stepped up my exercise and cut back on calories. Each week, my grandson must complete the daily chores on his list to receive his allowance. He is motivated to keep up with the chores each day as he is saving up his allowance to purchase a new surfboard. Another grandson, now in college, was not a stellar student in high school. He much preferred going surfing to hitting the books (a situation shared by many young people whenever "surf's up" in Hawaii, where I live). Now that he's found his passion, the study of geology, he is working diligently, hoping to keep achieving the grades that will secure his entrance into the graduate program he wants.

What do these scenarios have in common? Motivation, the force that drives us to achieve the goal we want for ourselves. There are two commonly acknowledged kinds of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from inside the individual rather than from any external or outside rewards. People engage in activities for no reward other than the interest and enjoyment of the task, perhaps pursuing a hobby or playing a game. For me, the enjoyment I find in cooking—prepping vegetables, watching the Hollandaise sauce thicken, kneading dough—is enough to keep me in the kitchen for hours. (Well, the end result tastes pretty good, too, which is probably why I needed the post-holiday regime!) Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the individual, leading to rewards such as money or grades. The reward may be a smiley face, an A, or a parent's cash reward for achievement. As teachers, we hope that what we do in the classroom will create opportunities that evoke intrinsic motivation in our students.

Motivating Students

The challenges we face today—racing to the top, leaving no child behind, making AYP, teaching to mandated standards and state assessments—sometimes make us feel that we have so much to "cover" in limited time that there is simply no room to provide activities that may elicit the motivation we hope students will find within themselves. But because we have chosen this demanding profession, because we care about the future of our students, we will continue to kindle the spark within students that helps them discover the satisfaction of achieving to the best of their ability in our classrooms.

Intrinsic motivation happens when the goals and rewards of the learning are meaningful to the learner. "Why are we even doing this? When will we ever have to know this in the real world?" are complaints we often hear in an English classroom. "Many students leave English language arts classrooms thinking that writing equals creative writing, literary analysis, or the five-paragraph essay, without making the connection that most people write as part of the work they do and as part of being a member of society" (Cox, Ortmeier-Hooper, and Tirabassi 72). If we can engage students in writing about real issues that matter to them, we may help change their attitude about "school" writing. One way is to ask them to achieve a real-world result as a consequence of their writing. Writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper that actually gets published or writing to the board of education about

a school issue of concern may help motivate students to value writing as a way to voice their concerns about real issues and to address real audiences. Some time well-spent in reading NCTE's National Gallery of Writing may help students understand that the world's work transpires through text: real people in all walks of life write every day as part of the work they do or as participating members of society.

When the learning assists the learners in integrating themselves with the real world and with others, it helps to create intrinsic motivation. Children today are bombarded by media of all genres, and part of our challenge as teachers of 21st-century literacies is to help students develop virtual literacy along with informational literacy. Many teachers have discovered that one of the most useful tools they have in motivating students toward literacies is popular culture. Although the idea of using video games and Web 2.0 tools such as Google Docs, glogs, wiki pages, and Twitter may seem at cross-purposes with our goal of encouraging literary reading, young people respond eagerly to the digital world as means of communication in their personal lives. Why not bring some of this enthusiasm into the classroom? "[T]eachers are wise to remember that having fun in the classroom is one of our greatest assets in motivating students. We must always be looking for ways to create those meaningful experiences that add relevance to students' reading" (Adams 59). Take a look at the Secondary Section blog (http://nctesecondary.blogspot.com/) for teaching strategies that motivate students with Web 2.0 tools. Student projects illustrated on the blog should convince even the most skeptical that real learning occurs when students are engaged with media in ways they enjoy.

Motivating Ourselves

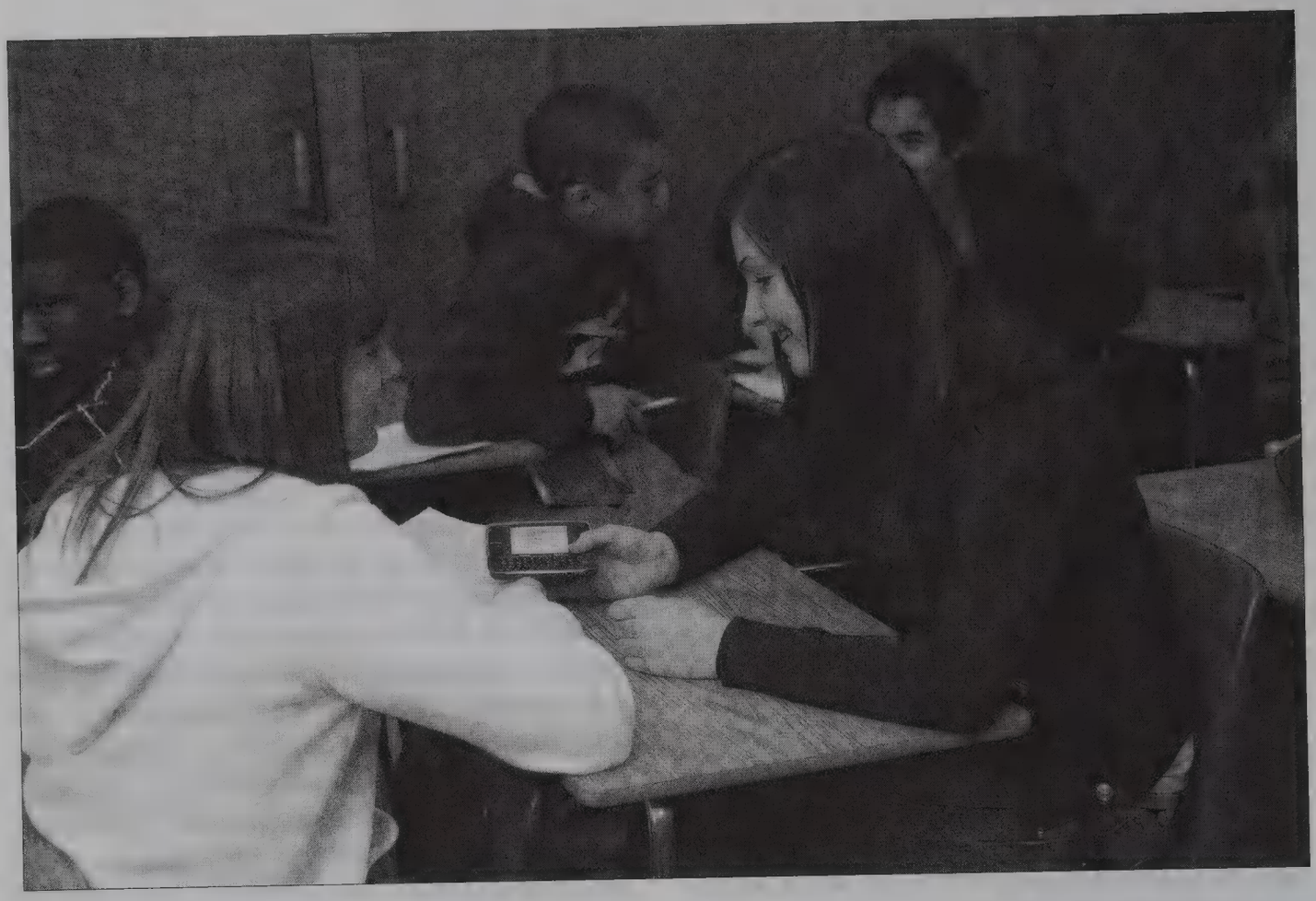
But what about us, the classroom teachers? Although there is plenty of information available on motivating students, there seems to be little advice on maintaining teacher motivation. In these stressful times of budget cuts, teacher layoffs, teacher accountability, ballooning class sizes, and unfortunately negative public opinion about our work, it is sometimes difficult to remember why we entered this profession, much less to remain motivated as we face each day's challenge. Yet it is imperative that we find ways to maintain the motivation we need to inspire our students. Albert Einstein said, "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means."

One thing that has kept me inspired through the years is my membership in NCTE and CEL and attendance at professional conferences (including the 2010 NCTE Annual Convention in Orlando in November). Regularly reading our professional journals helps us stay abreast of new teaching methods and research; discussing teaching ideas and issues with our peers provides inspiration. We tend to think of preparing teaching portfolios, documenting our classroom work, or seeking additional certification as dreaded tasks to be completed on top of everything else we need to do. But these tasks provide a chance to step back, look at what we are doing, and find opportunities for self-improvement that can bring satisfaction and increase motivation.

But with essays to grade, meetings and conferences to attend, lesson plans to prepare, emails to answer—all the myriad tasks that make up our professional lives—and trying to maintain some semblance of a personal life, where is there time to self-reflect, to find that inner passion that moves us to be the motivational models for our students? Anne Lamott says you have to make time to do this. "I've heard it said that every day you need half an hour of quiet time for yourself, or your Self, unless you're incredibly busy and stressed, in which case you need an hour. I promise you, it is there. Fight tooth and nail to find time, to make it" (38). I believe this "time for Self" truly is essential for each of us to maintain our equilibrium.

For me, and I'm certain for many teachers, one of the greatest motivators is that teaching moment when the light comes on in a student's face because he or she truly grasps what you've been teaching. It's that aha moment when a literary term—or even a grammar rule—becomes meaningful. I will never forget a time when I took a class to see a stunning production of *King Lear.* All were quiet as we left the theater and headed for the bus. One young man came up to me and said, "Now I know what you meant by hubris." That kept me going for a while.

Other inspirations come when you encounter former students who take a moment to thank you for how you influenced them. A few days ago at the



Thompson-McClellan Photography

local mall, a young man stopped me and said, "Ms. P! Remember me? I had you in tenth grade." I didn't remember his name, but I could place him near the back of my classroom. He went on, "You know all that stuff you used to tell us about how important it is to write well? I didn't think much of it then, but now I use it every day in my job. Thanks!" That felt good.

In a beautiful article in *American Scholar,* Mike Rose talks about how an effective teacher can bring a receptive mind to life. He describes how one teacher, 50 years ago, helped him find his way in school. He says, "Mr. McFarland was utterly serious, and he certainly didn't try to entertain us . . . . I'm surprised there wasn't a mutiny over the weight of the work. . . . Hard as the work was and pissed off as some students were by it, we could see that he was going all out, putting stupendous effort into reading our papers, pulling us aside after class, marching down to the administration office if he thought one of us was wronged" (74). We truly never know where our influence ends, but, as one of my coffee cups reports, "100 years from now, the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child." That's motivation enough for me.

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Wanda Porter, Secondary Section Steering Committee chair, is an education consultant in Kailua, Hawaii. Previously, she was the English department chair at Kamehameha Secondary School in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Looking for Some Magic? The 2010 NCTE Annual Convention

September—back to the books, the start of a new school year. Teachers and students feel the excitement of new beginnings and the opportunity for a fresh start. True, the challenge of standardized curriculum and tests, increasing class sizes, and myriad pressures from politicians and the general public may make teachers hesitant to open the classroom door to a new year. Perhaps it's time for some magic?

Look south to Orlando, Florida. There you will find the Orlando Magic professional basketball team, Disney's Magic Kingdom, and, in November, NCTE's Annual Convention at the Walt Disney World Resort. Although the Convention does not promise to bring magic to your teaching, it will certainly present ideas and interactions that can transform the literacy experiences you provide for your students.

Conventiongoers will have an opportunity to enjoy fresh air, sunshine, Mickey's Magic, and professional growth through the many sessions brought together by Program Chair Yvonne Siu-Runyan's theme, "Teachers and Students Together: Living Literate Lives."

The Secondary Section Steering Committee has put together an extensive program that we hope will meet the needs of both new and experienced teachers. Individual and panel/conversation sessions cover topics such as technology, reading and writing, literature, assessment, media literacy, and pop culture. From Chaucer to graphic novels and Web 2.0, you will find sessions to inspire and motivate.

Plan to arrive on Thursday and attend the Secondary Section Get-Together at 4:30 p.m. There you can greet old friends, meet new ones, and interact with our featured speaker, Lois Duncan. Author of 48 books, she is best known for young adult suspense novels.

Secondary Section 2010 NCTE Annual Convention Offerings at a Glance

Secondary Section Get-Together

Thursday, 4:30–6:00 p.m.
Featured Speaker: Lois Duncan

High School Matters

Friday, 2:30–5:15 p.m.
Keynote Speakers: Carol Jago, Jim Burke
Also includes a presentation by the Orlando Shakespeare Theater

Secondary Luncheon

Saturday, 12:30–2:30 p.m.
Featured Speaker: Firoozeh Dumas

On Friday, the Secondary Section Steering Committee will present this year's High School Matters. This interactive session features 25 roundtables on a variety of topics including moral literacy, manga, inquiry-based projects, ebooks, and retaining and mentoring new teachers.

Keynote speakers include NCTE President Carol Jago, who will discuss "The Intrepid Reader: Taking Chances While Managing Risk." Jim Burke, author of numerous books for English teachers, will speak about "Beginning with the End in Mind: Senior Moments." In addition, the Orlando Shakespeare Theater will entertain and inspire us with "Shakespeare Alive! An Interactive Approach to Introducing a Shakespearean Play."

The Secondary Section is extremely pleased to have Firoozeh Dumas as our luncheon speaker on Saturday. Born in Abadan, Iran, Dumas has lived in Iran and California. She grew up listening to her father recount the many colorful stories of his life. In 2001, with no previous writing experience, Dumas decided to write her stories as a gift for her children. Published as *Funny in Farsi* in 2003, her book was soon on national bestseller lists. Dumas was a finalist for the prestigious Thurber Prize for American Humor, the first Middle Eastern woman to receive this honor. For the past four years, Dumas has traveled the country reminding us that our commonalities far outweigh our differences, and she is doing so with humor. You won't want to miss this entertaining and inspiring event!

With all of the above and more at the 2010 NCTE Annual Convention, you are sure to find some motivational magic. Hope to see you in Orlando!

How to Create Nonreaders: Reflections on Motivation, Learning, and Sharing Power

Alfie Kohn
www.alfiekohn.org

Autonomy-supportive teachers seek a student's initiative . . . whereas controlling teachers seek a student's compliance.

—*Johnmarshall Reeve, Elizabeth Bolt, and Yi Cai*

Not that you asked, but my favorite Spanish proverb, attributed to the poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, can be translated as follows: "If they give you lined paper, write the other way." In keeping with this general sentiment, I'd like to begin my contribution to an issue of *EJ* whose theme is "Motivating Students" by suggesting that it is impossible to motivate students.

In fact, it's not really possible to motivate anyone, except perhaps yourself. If you have enough power, sure, you can make people, including students, do things. That's what rewards (e.g., grades) and punishments (e.g., grades) are for. But you can't make them do those things well—"You can command writing, but you can't command good writing," as Donald Murray once remarked—and you can't make them *want* to do those things. The more you rely on coercion and extrinsic inducements, as a matter of fact, the less interest students are likely to have in whatever they were induced to do.

What a teacher *can* do—*all* a teacher can do—is work with students to create a classroom culture, a climate, a curriculum that will nourish and sustain the fundamental inclinations that everyone starts out with: to make sense of oneself and the world, to become increasingly competent at tasks that are regarded as consequential, to connect with (and express oneself to) other people. Motivation—at least intrinsic motivation—is something to be supported, or if necessary revived. It's not something we can instill in students by acting on them in a certain way. You can tap their motivation, in other words, but you can't "motivate them." And if you think this distinction is merely semantic, then I'm afraid we disagree.

On the other hand, what teachers clearly have the ability to do with respect to students' motivation is kill it.[1] That's not just a theoretical possibility; it's taking place right this minute in too many classrooms to count. So, still mindful of the imperative to "write the other way," I'd like to be more specific about how a perversely inclined teacher might effectively destroy students' interest in reading and writing. I'll offer six suggestions without taking a breath, and then linger on the seventh.

Seven Ways to Kill Students' Motivation

1. Quantify their reading assignments.

Nothing contributes to a student's interest in (and proficiency at) reading more than the opportunity to read books that he or she has chosen. But it's easy to undermine the benefits of free reading. All you need to do is stipulate that students must read a certain number of pages, or for a certain number of minutes, each evening. When they're told how *much* to read, they tend to just "turn the pages" and "read to an assigned page number and stop," says Christopher Ward Ellsasser, a California high school teacher.[2]

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And when they're told how *long* to read—a practice more common with teachers of younger students—the results are not much better. As Julie King, a parent, reports, "Our children are now expected to read 20 minutes a night, and record such on their homework sheet. What parents are discovering (surprise) is that those kids who used to sit down and read for pleasure—the kids who would get lost in a book and have to be told to put it down to eat/play/whatever—are now setting the timer . . . and stopping when the timer dings. . . . Reading has become a chore, like brushing your teeth."

2. Make them write reports.

Jim DeLuca, a middle school teacher, summed it up: "The best way to make students hate reading is to make them prove to you that they have read. Some teachers use log sheets on which the students record their starting and finishing page for their reading time. Other teachers use book reports or other projects, which are all easily faked and require almost no reading at all. In many cases, such assignments make the students hate the book they have just read, no matter how they felt about it before the project."[3]

3. Isolate them.

I've been in the same book group for 25 years. We read mostly fiction, both classic and contemporary, at the rate of almost a book a month. I shudder to think how few novels I would have read over that period, and how much less pleasure (and insight) I would have derived from those I did manage to read, without the companionship of my fellow readers. Subscribers to this journal are probably familiar with literature circles and other ways of helping students to create a community of readers. You'd want to avoid such innovations—and have kids read (and write) mostly on their own—if your goal were to cause them to lose interest in what they're doing.

4. Focus on skills.

Children grow to love reading when it's about making meaning, when they're confronted directly by provocative ideas, compelling characters, delicious prose. But that love may never bloom if all the good stuff is occluded by too much attention to the machinery—or, worse, the approved vocabulary for describing that machinery. Knowing the definition of dramatic irony or iambic pentameter has the same relationship to being literate that memorizing the atomic weight of nitrogen has to doing science. When I look back on my brief career teaching high school English, I think I would have been far more successful had I asked fewer questions that have only one correct answer. I should have helped the kids to dive headfirst into the realm of metaphor rather than wasting their time on how a metaphor differs from a simile. "School teaches that literacy is about a set of skills, not a way to engage a part of the world," as Eliot Washor, Charles Mojkowski, and Deborah Foster recently wrote. "Consequently, many young people come to associate reading with schooling rather than with learning more about what interests them" (522).

5. Offer them incentives.

Scores of studies have confirmed that rewards tend to lead people to lose interest in whatever they had to do to snag them. This principle has been replicated with many different populations (across genders, ages, and nationalities) and with a variety of tasks as well as different kinds of inducements (money, A's, food, and praise, to name four).[4] You may succeed in getting students to read a book by dangling a reward in front of them for doing so, but their interest in reading, per se, is likely to evaporate—or, in the case of kids who have little interest to begin with, is unlikely to take root—because you've sent the message that reading is something one wouldn't *want* to do. (Duh. If it was fun, why would they be bribing me to do it?) Elaborate commercial programs (think Accelerated Reader or Book It!) may be the most efficient way to teach kids that reading isn't pleasurable in its own right, but ordinary grades will do just as well in a pinch. As far as I can tell, every single study that has examined grades and intrinsic motivation has found that the former has a negative effect on the latter.[5]

6. Prepare them for tests.

Just as a teacher's grade can be every bit as effective at killing motivation as imported incentive programs, so a teacher's quiz can hold its own against your state's standardized exam. It's not the test

itself that does the damage; it's what comes before. Heidegger said that life is lived toward—informed by and in anticipation of—death (*Sein zum Tode*). By analogy, a classroom where learning is always pointed to a test (*Lernen zum Examen?*) is one where ideas, and the act of reading, are experienced as just so many means to an end. That, of course, is exactly the same effect that rewards create, so if your classroom is one that emphasizes tests *and* grades, the damage is effectively doubled. And if those tests and grades are mostly focused on memorizing facts and mastering mechanical skills, well, you've won the Triple Crown at creating a roomful of nonreaders.

7. Restrict their choices.

Teachers have less autonomy these days than ever before. The predominant version of school reform, with its emphasis on "accountability" and its use of very specific curriculum standards enforced by tests, proceeds from the premise that teachers need to be told what, and how, to teach. At the same time, this movement confuses excellence with uniformity ("All students in ninth grade will . . .") and with mere difficulty (as if that which is more "rigorous" were necessarily better). It's now reaching its apotheosis with an initiative to impose the same core standards on every public school classroom in the nation. This effort has been sponsored primarily by corporate executives, politicians, and test manufacturers, but, shamefully, certain education organizations, including NCTE, have failed to take a principled stand in opposition. Instead, they have eagerly accepted whatever limited role in the design of standards they're permitted by the corporate sponsors, thereby giving the impression that this prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach to schooling enjoys legitimacy and the support of educators.

The bigger picture here, which transcends and predates national standards, features top-down control all the way along the education food chain, from legislators and state school officials to school boards to superintendents to principals to teachers. That means the pivotal question for teachers—a moral as well as a practical question—is whether they will treat students the way they, themselves, are being treated . . . or the way they *wish* they were being treated.

Those who choose the latter course—a "working with" approach—make a point of bringing students into the process of making decisions whenever possible. Teachers who choose the former—a "doing to" approach—may, as I say, be taking their cue from the management style of those who seek to micromanage *them.* Then again, they may be reproducing the teacher-centered classrooms with which they're familiar. Or perhaps they just find it difficult to give up control. As long-time educators Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar put it rather provocatively, "Teachers probably wouldn't have originally chosen their vocation if they didn't crave the spotlight on some deep psychological level. The hunger to 'really teach something' has probably derailed more student-centered innovations than administrative cowardice and textbook company co-option combined" (12).

Mea culpa. When I taught, almost every classroom decision was made unilaterally by me: what students would read, in what format they would respond to the readings, how their learning would be assessed, how much time would be devoted to a book or topic, whether a given task would be done in small groups or as a whole class, how conflicts would be resolved, whether homework was really necessary (and, if so, what would be assigned and when it would be due), how the chairs were arranged and what was posted on the walls. To be honest, it never occurred to me to ask rather than to tell. After all, it was my classroom, wasn't it?

Well, yes, it was, but not because it had to be—only because I kept all the power to myself. And my students were the poorer for it.

The sad irony is that as children grow older and become more capable of making decisions, they're given less opportunity to do so in schools. In some respects, teenagers actually have less to say about their learning—and about the particulars of how they'll spend their time in school each day—than do kindergartners. Thus, the average American high school is excellent preparation for adult life . . . assuming that one lives in a totalitarian society.

When parents ask, "What did you do in school today?" kids often respond, "Nothing." Howard Gardner pointed out that they're probably right, because "typically school is *done to* students" (243; italics in original). This sort of enforced passivity is particularly characteristic of classrooms where students are excluded from any role in shap-

ing the curriculum, where they're on the receiving end of lectures and questions, assignments, and assessments. One result is a conspicuous absence of critical, creative thinking—something that (irony alert!) the most controlling teachers are likely to blame on the students themselves, who are said to be irresponsible, unmotivated, apathetic, immature, and so on. But the fact is that kids learn to make good decisions by making decisions, not by following directions.

Conversely, students who have almost nothing to say about what happens in class are more likely to act out, tune out, burn out, or simply drop out. Again, it takes some courage to face the fact that these responses are related to what *we're* doing, or not doing. And the same is true of my larger point in this essay: A lack of opportunity to make decisions may well manifest itself in a lack of interest in reading and writing. Were that our goal, our single best strategy might be to run a traditional teacher-centered, teacher-directed classroom.

Supporting Students' Desire to Learn

At this point, I'll abandon the somewhat labored conceit of showing you how to kill interest and instead try to suggest, in more straightforward fashion, some ways to think about how students can play a more active role in their own learning. My assumption is that if you've read this far, you'd probably like to support their desire to learn and read.

First, then, a few general principles.

1. Supporting their autonomy isn't just about having them pick this over that.

"The experience of self-determination is not something that can be given to the student through the presentation of an array of teacher-determined options (e.g., 'Here are six books; which do you want to read today?')" (Reeve, Nix, and Hamm 388). I think there are two insights here. The first is that deeper learning and enthusiasm require us to let students *generate* possibilities rather than just choose items from our menu; construction is more important than selection. The second is that what we really need to offer is "autonomy support," an idea that's psychological, not just pedagogical. It's derived from a branch of psychology called self-determination theory, founded by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, among others. To support students' autonomy is to meet their need to be in control of their own lives, to offer opportunities to decide along with the necessary guidance and encouragement, to "minimiz[e] the salience of evaluative pressure and any sense of coercion in the classroom" and "maximiz[e] students' perceptions of having a voice and choice" (Niemic and Ryan 139).[6]

In 1993 I wrote about the advantages of offering voice and choice, detailing how students benefited intellectually, morally, and psychologically, according to the available research.[7] Since then, the data have continued to accumulate. Two experts in the field offered this summary in 2006:

> Empirical research has shown that students with autonomy-supportive teachers, compared with students with controlling teachers, experience not only greater perceived autonomy, but also more positive functioning in terms of their classroom engagement, emotionality, creativity, intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being, conceptual understanding, academic achievement, and persistence in school. (Reeve and Jang 210)[8]

2. Autonomy can be supported—and choices can be made—collectively.

While it is surely important for students to be able to make some decisions that apply only to themselves, many more opportunities should be available for the class to figure out things together. In fact, one might say that when autonomy and community are combined, they define a concept more often invoked than practiced in our society: democracy.

Even during the absurdly short class periods still being used in most high schools, it makes sense to devote some of that limited time to class meetings in which students can solve problems and make decisions. I once sat in on several classes taught by Keith Grove at Dover-Sherborn High School near Boston and noticed that such meetings were critical to his teaching; he had come to realize that the feeling of community (and active participation) they produced made whatever time remained for the explicit curriculum far more productive than devoting the whole period to talking at rows of silent kids. Together the students decided whether to review the homework in small

groups or as a whole class. Together they decided when it made sense to schedule their next test. (After all, what's the point of assessment—to have students show you what they know when they're ready to do so, or to play "gotcha"?) Interestingly, Grove says that his classes are quite structured even though they're unusually democratic, and he sees his job as being "in control of putting students in control" (Kohn, "Choices").

3. It's not all or nothing.

Teachers who favor a traditional approach to teaching sometimes offer a caricature of an autonomy-supportive classroom—one devoid of intellectual challenge where kids do whatever they feel like—in order to rationalize rejecting this model. But autonomy support not only doesn't exclude structure, as Keith Grove reminds us; it also doesn't rule out active teacher involvement. That involvement can be direct, such as when teacher and students negotiate a mutually acceptable due date for an essay. (Instead of "You folks choose," it may be "Let's figure this out together.") Or the involvement can be indirect, with the teacher setting up broad themes for the course and students making decisions within those parameters. But that doesn't mean we should be prepared to share power with students only about relatively minor issues. It may make sense to start with that and then challenge ourselves to involve them in thinking about bigger questions as you (and they) become more comfortable with a democratic classroom.

4. "See above."

The half-dozen suggestions for killing interest in reading in the first part of this essay don't become irrelevant just because students are given more authority to direct their learning, individually and collectively. For example, rewards are still counterproductive even if kids get to choose what goodie they'll get. And there's reason to worry if a language arts course is focused mostly on narrowly defined facts and skills even if students are permitted to make decisions about the details. (As one of Bianca's suitors observes in *The Taming of the Shrew,* "There's small choice in rotten apples.") Even autonomy support in its richest sense works best in the context of a course that's pedagogically valuable in other ways—and avoids various familiar but counterproductive practices.

Concrete Ideas

Finally, here are a few specific suggestions for bringing students in on making decisions, offered here in the hope that they will spark you to think of others in the same spirit:

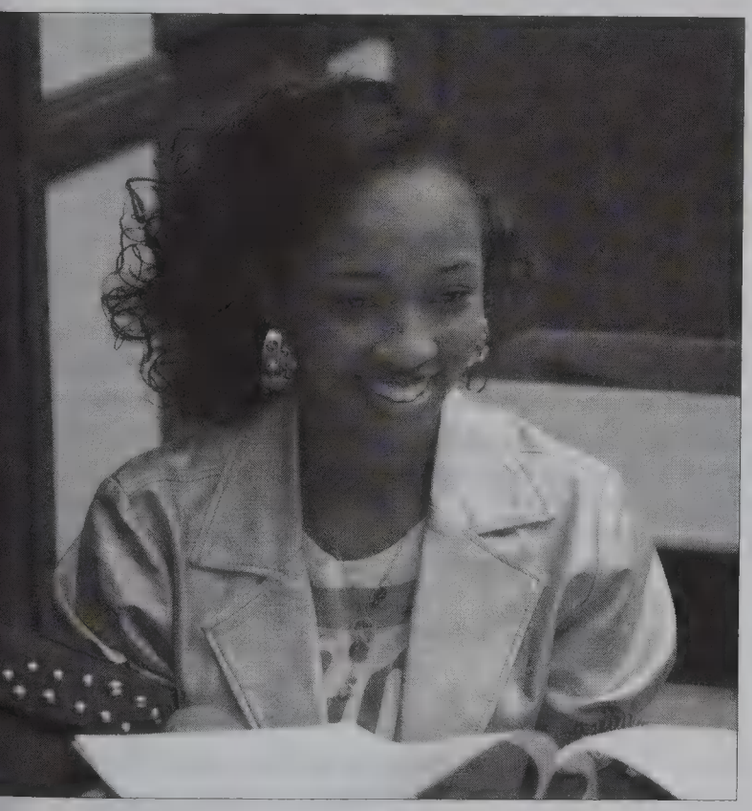
- Let students sample a work of literature, then generate their own questions and discussion topics—for themselves and one another.
- Before having students help each other to revise their writing, invite them to brainstorm possible questions they might ask about its construction and its impact on the reader (rather than having them simply apply *your* editing guidelines or, worse, evaluating the writing against a prefabricated rubric[9]).
- Have students think together about ideas for the papers they'll write, then follow up once the writing is underway by inviting each student to ask the group for suggestions. Encourage discussion about the rationale for, and usefulness of, each idea that emerges in order to promote reflection that may well benefit everyone.
- When you're planning to respond to their journals or other writings, begin by asking students—individually and as a class—what kinds of responses would be most helpful to them. (Wouldn't you prefer that administrators proceed that way when offering feedback on your teaching?)
- Let students choose the audience for whom they're writing, as well as the genre in which they respond to something they've read (e.g., play, op-ed, speech).
- Check in periodically with students during class meetings about how the course is going for them, whether the decision-making process seems to be working, whether the climate is conducive to learning. Ask what might make discussions and assignments more productive and satisfying—but only if you're really open to making changes based on what they tell you.
- Bring students in on the process of assessment by asking them to join you in thinking about alternatives to conventional tests.

"How can you show me what you understood, where you still need help, and what *I* may need to rethink about how I taught the unit?" Beyond the format of the assessment, invite them as a class to suggest criteria by which someone's work might be evaluated—and, later, have them apply those criteria to what they've done.

- Remember that group decision making doesn't require voting, which is basically just adversarial majoritarianism. Help them to acquire the skills and disposition to reach for a deeper kind of democracy, one in which compromises are generated and consensus is reached.

Giving Up Control

To be willing to give up some control is to avoid getting too invested in the amazing course you designed. Strive to take pleasure and pride from how you help students to learn and become excited about learning, not just from the curriculum itself. Even the most thoughtful lesson, the cleverest assignment, the richest reading list is much less likely to goose students and engage them and help them to think more subtly, if you came up with it on your own and imposed it *on* them. What matters is not what we teach; it's what they learn,[10] and the probability of real learning is far higher when the students have a lot to say about both the content and the process.



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The best teachers, I find, spend at least some of their evenings smacking themselves on the forehead—figuratively, at least—as they reflect on something that happened during the day. "Why did *I* decide that, when I could have asked the kids?" And, thinking about some feature of the course yet to come: "Is this a choice I should be making for the students rather than with them?" One Washington, DC, creative writing teacher was pleased with himself for announcing to students that it was up to them to decide how to create a literary magazine—until he realized later that he had incrementally reasserted control. "I had taken a potentially empowering project and turned it into a showcase of what [I] could do" (Miranda 10). It takes insight and guts to catch oneself at what amounts to an exercise in pseudodemocracy. Keeping hold of power—overtly for traditionalists, perhaps more subtly for those of us who think of ourselves as enlightened progressives—is a hell of a lot easier than giving it away.

But if we're serious about helping students to fall in love with literature, to get a kick out of making words fall together in just the right order, then we have to be attentive to what makes these things more, and less, likely to happen. It may take us awhile, but ultimately our classrooms should turn the usual default setting on its head so the motto becomes: Let the students decide except when there's a good reason why we have to decide for them.

Notes

1. The management theorist Frederick Herzberg made an analogous argument about the asymmetrical motivational properties of money in the workplace: Just because paying people too little can be demotivating doesn't mean that paying them more will elicit greater satisfaction or more motivation to do their best. This helps to explain why pay-for-performance plans are doomed to fail.
2. All uncited quotations, like this one, are derived from personal communications.
3. Regie Routman invites us to imagine ourselves on the receiving end of such assignments: "Think about the last time you read a book you loved. Imagine how you would have felt if you had been required to write a book report or a summary that had to include the main idea and supporting details. Or, if at the end of chapters, you'd been required to write answers to questions. For myself,

that would have been enough to turn me off to reading the book" (177).

4. See Kohn, *Punished;* Deci, Koestner, and Ryan.
5. I review some of this research, as well as studies that find a detrimental effect of grades on quality of learning and preference for challenge, in Kohn, *Punished, Schools,* "From Degrading."
6. For an argument that "cognitive autonomy support" may be more important for student engagement with learning than "procedural" or "organizational" autonomy support, see Stefanou et al.
7. See Kohn, "Choices."
8. Many of these effects were confirmed in a large meta-analysis published two years later; see Patall, Cooper, and Robinson.
9. On this last point, see Wilson; Kohn, "Trouble."
10. See Kohn, "It's Not What We Teach."

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Alfie Kohn writes and speaks widely on education and human behavior. His eleven books include *Punished by Rewards* (1993), *Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community* (1996), *The Schools Our Children Deserve* (1999), *The Case against Standardized Testing* (2000), and *The Homework Myth* (2006). Kohn has been described by *Time* magazine as "perhaps the country's most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades [and] test scores." His criticisms of competition and rewards have helped to shape the thinking of educators—as well as parents and managers—across the country and abroad. He lectures widely at universities and to school faculties and parent groups, as well as speaking at staff development seminars and keynoting national education conferences. His previous articles for *EJ* include "The Trouble with Rubrics" (March 2006) and a parody advertisement called "Accelerated Direct Success" (September 2001). Kohn lives (actually) in the Boston area and (virtually) at www.alfiekohn.org.

What Makes You Want to Go to English Class?

Making What You Already Know Better

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What makes me want to go to English class is the opportunity to participate. I daily attend my advanced sophomore English class expecting a thoroughly different experience from what any of my other classes can offer. There is a single, critical reason for this difference: in math, the sciences, and history, I am being told information that I do not know. We take notes, we do the homework, and we cement the skill. It's the widely accepted style of learning in schools. However, in English, learning takes a different course. It's not that I can't do the skill: it's just that I can do it better. It's not that I don't have the ideas: it's just that I only have some of the ideas.

This provides a different feeling from what I get in my advanced chemistry class, where I am fed concepts and when students raise their hands it is to answer a question. In English, when I raise my hand I feel as though I'm offering something very valid. No matter how abstract or controversial, the comment I make has the opportunity to be something no one else in the class has yet thought of. The topic of participation also helps me to see more about my peers. And it's not just on a "he's smart" or "he's stupid" level, either: you can tell when someone who's been reading has been deeply affected by the book at hand.

Participation makes the English classroom special. You have the opportunity to be out of the box, but also to be scholarly. You aren't ever overwhelmed by the concepts, but instead simply striving to make what you already know better.

The Antidote for a Bad Morning: English Class

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You know when you wake up one gloomy morning on the wrong side of the bed, put your shirt on inside-out, get shocked by the door knob, open the front door and step into a puddle of mud under the pouring rain, miss the bus, and end up at school late, looking like a wet chicken? After a morning like that, when you open a test booklet in math and you see log and fractions, it makes you say [insert word of choice] and turn the page! But never can going to English class make you feel that way.

The smell of knowledge revitalizes your senses as you open the door of your English class, and as you step in, you embark on the Hogwarts Express to enter a world of exploration of cultures, free expression, and creative and analytical thinking. There is no oppression or obligations; all is part of the adventures and discovery of new knowledge in the world of artistic expression of the language. Writing an essay is like putting down words to create wonders, and the grammar is simply the root of

Jack's Bean Tree. Never can English class be more rewarding: when you open a book, you dive into a world of imagination, fantasy, palpitation, and tragedy, and when the journey achieves its end, another adventure awaits you.

Learning in English class is not less adventurous: there is no limit to expression, creativity, or oppression. Going to English class can be entering the wardrobe to the land of Narnia or *Lord of the Rings*' Moria Door. Consider the learning to be a challenge, like the perilous road Frodo takes to defeat Sauron. All the knowledge needed is found through the exploration and confrontation of a new world. Feeling excited? Grab a cup of coffee and follow me. And you know where I am going!

A Little Spice Never Hurt Anyone!

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A typical English class is full of vocabulary words, textbooks, and colorful graphs and charts. But is this really helping the educational process? For years, teachers have followed the practical, typical educational approach. Students need something fun: something that will motivate them to come to class every day.

What makes me want to go to English class is my teacher Mr. DiSchiavi. His sheer hilarity and innovative ideas motivate me and others. He challenges students by daring them to think outside the box. One thing I enjoy is that he does not stay on the same topic for too long. His variety keeps the students engaged and interested. Staying on one topic for too long can bore students, leaving them uninterested and unmotivated to attend class. Mr. DiSchiavi's great teaching skills and hilarious stories are good assets. These funny stories relate to the topic being discussed.

One tip for English teachers is to eliminate vocabulary quizzes. Give a quiz, and then a day later it is forgotten. Rather, a teacher could have the students add new words into their writing and speaking. Vocabulary quizzes are for memorization, not interpretation. Another suggestion is to switch up classroom activities. A little spice never hurt anyone! Adding activities such as group reading can help students that are having trouble with a particular text. Also, cut out class decoration; the classroom may be beautiful, but what about the instruction? Sometimes cracking a joke or two helps, as well. Lastly, have students choose books they *want* to read. For example, you can suggest a list of books, and then students can pick what they want to read. This prevents boredom and promotes the independence factor.

I go to English class because I know I'll learn in a fun, educational way.

I'm Always Attached to English Class

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Some days, I rush to English for the books—those lovely, tempting novels crammed on the bookshelf. Other days, it's the grammar I anticipate: I crave the thrill of diagramming a ten-clause sentence, the delight of circling gerunds and underlining infinitives. And some days, I long for the writing: the way words fit together to invoke emotion, to mimic sounds and shapes and sensations that I've never experienced—that exist only in the colossal labyrinth of my own mind; I crave the contentment unfurling from a sentence that ebbs and flows and swells to the rhythm of my own internal voice. But always, I escape to English for the solace of intellect—because English is a haven; in no other class do the students listen as compassionately, exchange ideas as freely, philosophize as deeply, and understand each other as completely as they do in English class.

Some days, I race to class just to leap into my familiar chair as soon as possible. No matter where my seat is, I'm plugged into the giant network of thoughts and passion and creativity that is English class; I'm fixed onto the end of an extension cord that never breaks. And even when I'm measuring acid, or factoring polynomials, or eating dinner, I'm still attached to English class. And so I smile all the way to English class—to 40 minutes of stimulating mental recharge and energizing conversation—because English is unique, without a modifier.

Erika Daniels

Creating Motivating Learning Environments: What We Can Learn from Researchers and Students

Eschewing punishment and reward schemes, and with references to current academic research and comments from secondary students, Daniels suggests concrete methods for helping students motivate themselves.

I began my career teaching kindergarten. All 38 of my students (this was before class size reduction) showed up to school excited to be there and eager to learn. When I moved to the middle school, it was an entirely different story. I was stunned when most of my students didn't care whether or not they were successful academically. I encountered the same attitudes years later as a ninth-grade English teacher. Many students told me they "hated" reading and that school was "boring." At faculty meetings across the years, colleagues have spent countless hours discussing students' lack of motivation and brainstorming strategies for engaging them. Some students responded well as we tried to make our presentations more exciting and our assignments more hands-on. Others continued to sit with their hoods up and heads down, disinterested in the content or the process.

In 2007 I left the full-time English classroom and began teaching in a college of education, but I have stayed connected to students. As I observe in dynamic teachers' classrooms and interview students to find out what makes them motivated, I have learned a lot. The students are excellent at articulating what they care about and what they need, and we can learn a lot from listening to their stories.

Additionally, academic researchers (for a good review of the literature, see Anderman and Anderman) have spent decades researching motivation and have developed a clear definition. Briefly, "to be motivated means *to be moved* to do something" (Ryan and Deci 54; italics in original). When we combine the two bodies of information—academic research and student interactions—some clear strategies emerge. First, however, it is essential to understand what motivation looks like in a school setting.

What Is Motivation in School?

Sustained motivation comes from within an individual (Ryan and Deci 54), but it can be influenced by contextual factors. Teachers cannot *make* someone motivated, but they *can* create motivating learning environments. Students feel motivated when

1. They feel some sense of autonomy or control (Ryan and Deci 57).
2. They feel connected to the class and the school (Daniels 53; Deci and Ryan 12).
3. They feel as if they possess the skills necessary to meet the challenges of school (Csikszentmihalyi 53).

The students I have spoken to over the years echo this research. They are not looking only for "easy" work. They are not looking only for "nice" teachers. They are looking for clear and specific instruction from their teachers so that they know what they need to accomplish (autonomy), knowledge that their teachers care about and are committed to the class (relatedness), and a belief that they *can* do what is being asked of them (competence).

When students learn that they do have control over their choices, thoughts, and actions, it means that their teachers have created motivating learning environments. They are more likely to learn the material or complete the tasks because they feel it is their choice (Anderman and Anderman 17). When students engage because they see value in the

learning experience, that intrinsic motivation leads to increased engagement (Bandura 102).

In one high school English classroom, Heather K. Casey found that students were engaged with reading when they made decisions about what they would read and how they would participate (290). Their teacher allowed them to choose from a range of texts to demonstrate their understanding of the literature concepts she taught. The autonomy that came from allowing students to make their own choices led to increased motivation. They wanted to perform well because they were invested in their work. It was not another mindless lesson that meant little to them personally.

Students in middle school and high school both want and need to know that they can exercise some semblance of control over their lives (Deci and Ryan 15). Motivation in school often results when students are allowed to make choices over how they will demonstrate their learning. If a teacher needs to know whether the class understood the universal truths in *Romeo and Juliet,* giving them a choice among writing an essay, doing a presentation, or making a video results in the same knowledge. When teachers allow their students to make choices about what is right for them, students develop ownership over their learning, which leads to increased desire to participate in school (Mednick 2). If their learning matters to them, students will care more about demonstrating what they know.

If a teacher needs to know whether the class understood the universal truths in *Romeo and Juliet*, giving them a choice among writing an essay, doing a presentation, or making a video results in the same knowledge.

I am convinced that there are several conditions that allow teachers to create motivating learning environments. Two of the most important are (1) ensuring that, more days than not, the classroom is a place filled with active learning and the construction of meaning; and (2) listening to what worries our students and teaching them how to manage that stress so they can concentrate on their academics.

Active Learning: Constructing Meaning

When I taught kindergarten, our days consisted of reading and acting out stories; making letters out of beans, rice, or other food products; sorting blocks to form patterns; and chronicling the life cycle of our pet turtle. In other words, they were "rigorous" and would have been standards-based (if the standards had existed then), but they were also active, imaginative, and fun. The students were motivated to learn because they were involved in hands-on, active learning over which they had ownership or control. Although that was kindergarten, the secondary English classroom also benefits when active learning is the norm.

Literacy is about communication. People read and listen to make meaning and speak and write to convey meaning. However, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are not the only ways to communicate. As James Paul Gee says, "Images, symbols, graphs, diagrams, artifacts, and many other visual symbols are particularly significant" (17). Teachers who encourage students to demonstrate their understanding of English content or literacy skills through imagery and symbols when appropriate create motivating learning environments. For example, doing a one-page paper to show the theme of a novel through quotes, words, pictures, and symbols allows the students to construct meaning as they decide what is more or less important.

One student, TJ, described how students often rise to the challenge and learn from each other when given the opportunity. "There's this one kid in our class that usually has bad grades, and he did the legend of Sleepy Hollow. He got this 3D model of it. He got all these cool trees, and then he got the figure of the character. It was really cool how people can get bad grades but still do well on creative things." TJ went on to explain how most of the students in his English class worked diligently because they were actively involved in their learning. Their teacher taught the standards, modeled how to do the work, and gave activities that allowed students to apply their learning in a variety of ways such as making models, writing essays, and participating in discussions.

Another student, Courtney, continued by saying that merely emphasizing right and wrong answers also decreases student motivation. They want to know exactly what will be on the test so that they can focus their studying and get it "right." However, Courtney said, "When there's no perfect answer, then you just put whatever and can keep on going." The English curriculum is well-suited to

asking students questions and encouraging them to formulate opinions based on background knowledge and text evidence. Courtney, her classmates, and most students want to be able to wrestle with the content, talk to each other about their emerging understandings, and identify where/why/how the content matters in their lives. When we put students in control of constructing understandings, they learn better and feel more engaged. As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains, "the quality of experience of people who play with and transform the opportunities in their surroundings [and, one could argue, in their learning] . . . is clearly more developed as well as more enjoyable" (149).

Active Learning—Relevance

"An academic discipline . . . is not primarily content, in the sense of facts and principles. It is rather primarily a lived and historically changing set of distinctive social practices" (Gee 22). Based on Gee's description of an academic discipline, it is no wonder that students without any context are not motivated to learn. Teenagers both need and want to know how their academic learning connects to their lives and to have the background knowledge to make sense of that content. In the English classroom, motivating teachers remember that the canon of excellent literature may not mean much to a 21st-century teenager because that teenager may not have meaningful experiences with the social practices associated with reading, thinking about, and understanding classic texts. They may not understand the historical context that existed when the novels were written. They may not have had exposure to the type of language written during another time period.

This does not mean that we should not teach the canon nor does it mean that we should not challenge students. It does mean that motivating teachers provide experiences for students to actively engage with the texts and to create understandings as they connect their current experiences with the social expectations of the authors' time. In other words, "active, critical learning in any domain should lead to learners becoming, in a sense, *designers*" (Gee 96; italics in original). Motivating teachers create lesson plans that encourage students to connect the content to their own lives and thus design their own understandings.

Creating active learning experiences and ensuring relevance in the curriculum are essential. They are not the only elements of motivating learning environments, however. Students also need to learn how to manage the myriad demands on their time so that academic involvement does not slip to the bottom of the priority list.

Managing Stress

Secondary school represents a significant change from elementary school. In middle school and high school, students have more teachers, more homework, more responsibility, and more stress. According to the students themselves, the sheer increase in stress contributes to their lack of motivation to achieve. Although they rarely complained about the stress in our conversations, the students were overwhelmed and desperate for ways to manage their stress and prioritize their time.

Buffy was failing Math. She had responsibilities at home that consumed most of her afterschool hours, and her parents expected chores to take precedence over homework. She told me, "I'm not that fast at doing homework. At home my parents yell at me if I don't do my chores so sometimes I don't finish my Math homework. I'm failing that class. I just don't think all the teachers understand how much homework they are giving us. It's hard to keep up." On the other hand, Buffy was earning an A in Social Studies because "the teacher knows how hard everything is. She knows giving too much is too much. I can finish all my homework in that class, so it's my favorite class."

Most students want to be able to wrestle with the content, talk to each other about their emerging understandings, and identify where/why/how the content matters in their lives. When we put students in control of constructing understandings, they learn better and feel more engaged.

Although students seemed to understand that doing homework is an inevitable, even necessary, part of school, they wished it were more meaningful and deliberate. Sophia said, "I actually get why homework is important; I just don't like having a lot of homework on the same exact thing. It should be like a puzzle, some reading, and some questions.

Thompson-McClellan Photography

Not just four pages of questions." When teenagers face tremendous amounts of stress without a commensurate increase in support, they are less likely to develop their talents (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen 42). Jamie said, "It's [homework] way too much. It's way overwhelming. It's stressing kids out, and it's not going to make them do better." Motivating teachers give students homework but also teach them how to break it into manageable chunks. They work with colleagues to avoid having several major assignments due in the same week. This helps students manage the stress of secondary school, which protects their motivation. When students feel overwhelmed by school, they often stop trying before they even begin.

Motivating teachers are honest about the demands of real life. When they share pieces of their lives with students, they show that everyone faces stress, conflict, and uncertainties but still ends up OK. For example, many teachers model how to write assignments in planners. Motivating teachers also model how to break the task into manageable chunks and then strategize to complete those chunks. For a long time, I diligently had my students copy the homework into their planners, reminded them to check the planners when they got home, and then expected the assignment to be submitted on the specified due date. As many secondary teachers know, the assignments sometimes came in and sometimes did not. What I missed was teaching the students how to (1) look at and use the planners when they got home and (2) balance the persuasive paper due in English with the Math test on the same day with soccer practice after school and family responsibilities at home. Although perhaps not technically part of a teacher's academic responsibilities, taking the time to teach how to manage time and prioritize tasks increases students' motivation dramatically.

Another, even simpler, strategy for increasing motivation is acknowledging students' fears, worries, and anxieties. By honoring their feelings and listening to what they are going through, motivating teachers indicate that the feelings are legitimate. They then have more credibility when they ask the students to compartmentalize their worry and focus on the task at hand. When teachers provide follow-up resources for use after the period is

over, they further develop their connectedness to students. The worries do not disappear, but students put them aside long enough to learn the English content.

Finally, collaborating with other teachers to spread major assignments out contributes significantly to student motivation. Make the major research paper due the week before or after the major math test instead of the same day/week. This allows students to focus on one major task at a time, which increases the likelihood of success. A better chance of success usually translates into more motivated students.

Sometimes it is impossible to avoid a "crunch time." When it is, students appreciate honesty. We should tell students that this given week is going to be stressful (finals week is a good example), but we should also remind them that it is just one week. Knowing that their teachers are aware of their stress increases the possibility that students will put their heads down and plow through the crunch time. Being sensitive to the stress in students' lives does not mean coddling them or not challenging them. It means sharing the coping strategies that we adults have learned through years of experience.

Final Thoughts

The motivation paradigm that has driven most teaching practice for over a century focuses on external factors such as rewards and punishments that theoretically encourage students to work more diligently in school (Anderman and Anderman 41). *Theoretically* is the key word here. What the research actually tells us is that rewards and punishments work wonders at controlling students' immediate classroom behavior. What they do not do is foster an intrinsic, long-term desire to learn, behave, and achieve.

Changing the paradigm to focus on the factors that support internal motivation (such as active learning and stress management) is not happening quickly or easily. But it is happening. Educators are beginning to listen to the students and understand that what the students say they want is closely aligned with what the motivation research identifies as important and what effective teaching pedagogy identifies as best practice. Teachers cannot make students motivated, but they can create environments that allow the students to feel motivated for themselves.

Rewards and punishments work wonders at controlling students' immediate classroom behavior. What they do not do is foster an intrinsic, long-term desire to learn, behave, and achieve.

When we talk to students about what motivates them to achieve in school, they are articulate and thoughtful about their responses. They know what makes them motivated. It is up to us to listen to them.

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Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher

Motivation Requires a Meaningful Task

The authors closely examine methods and rationale for creating effective group assignments that motivate and challenge students.

Motivation has long been viewed as a key element of learning (e.g., Guthrie and Wigfield). A study of over 300 high school juniors and seniors demonstrated that motivation was at least as predictive of achievement in a subject as was intelligence (Steinmayr and Spinath). Among younger students, motivation is a linchpin to learning, even at a time developmentally when overall motivation for schoolwork is in decline, bottoming out at the seventh-grade level (Wigfield and Eccles). While there are many factors that might explain this decline (i.e., changes in the structure of the school day, developmental changes regarding affiliation and belonging), as a result teachers too often find themselves assigning less-rigorous tasks designed to placate disenchanted students.

However, differences between children and adolescents are pronounced, especially in the ways they interact with one another. In particular, adolescents increasingly turn to their peer groups for validation and support. The interplay between motivation and development provides middle school and high school English teachers with the unique ability to capitalize on this. In our high school English classrooms, we do this daily through collaborative learning. The energy and motivation that occur when students are engaged in productive group work result in meaningful learning. Students, even those who routinely drag themselves through the school day, find reasons to read, write, discuss, and create when in the company of like-minded peers. However, we have also learned through experience that motivation doesn't occur simply because we've moved the desks together. We need to create meaningful tasks that are tailored to the developmental, academic, and social needs of students.

The Value of a Meaningful Task

Without question, adolescents favor group work as a tool for learning and socializing, but only when particular elements are in place. A useful device for ensuring that all are present is the TARRGET framework (Ames): Task, Autonomy, Recognition, Resources, Grouping, Evaluation, and Time. *Task* refers to the nature of the learning activity itself, designed to be interesting and challenging, and paired with useful *Resources. Autonomy* also plays an important role, as adolescents are motivated when they have a voice in decisions and choices. *Recognition* and *Evaluation* are related to one another and refer to the opportunities students have to both offer and receive each. Finally, adolescents in the Carole Ames study preferred working with others in *Groups,* with the teacher's *Time* devoted to providing help and encouragement.

The task challenge is central to creating a motivating environment. While there is a certain intuitive logic to reducing difficulty in order to keep students motivated, the evidence among adolescents is quite the opposite. Developmentally, a mark of adolescence is the pleasure one takes in approaching a challenging task (Hektner and Asakawa). Even the seventh graders in Patricia O'Connell Schmakel's study said they wished that they had been assigned "harder work, more work, and mental work" (743). But classroom tasks must

be accompanied by the elements described in the TARRGET framework if they are to be used to increase motivation. These factors—the task design, social constructs, teacher role, and resource supports—together add up to increased rigor. These can be witnessed by observing the students, teacher, and the physical environment of the classroom. The indicators of successful productive group work that emanate from collaborative learning include attention to the complexity of the task, the interactions of students with the materials and one another, the language and teacher supports, and the group composition. A rubric of these elements can be found in Figure 1.

Complexity of Task

To capitalize on the usefulness of productive group work as a key to motivation, attention to the complexity of the task is necessary. A major purpose of collaborative learning is that it is an opportunity for students to consolidate their understanding about concepts they are learning. Therefore, while some aspects of the task might be new to them, others are not. The task should be novel in the sense that it is not an exact duplication of what the teacher has previously modeled for them, as dutiful task replication does not result in student interest. Instead, the collaborative task should require students to utilize previously learned concepts in a new way.

In addition, the task should offer the possibility of productive failure (Kapur). By this, we don't mean that the task should be beyond their capabilities, but rather that it is structured in such a way that the outcome is not a given. Therefore, tasks are somewhat ill-defined in the sense that it is not simply a matter of mindlessly following a series of steps. Our classroom experiences have shown us that when the task is sufficiently difficult, students must work together. In fact, a good gauge of task difficulty has to do with the way the group approaches the task. If students merely divide it up and agree to meet again later to assemble the final product, it's likely that the task was not challenging. Our overall goal for them—to interact with each other and the concepts—never comes to fruition.

In our high school classrooms, we read target texts with students as a class but reserve student choice for related reading. Both the target text and the student selections are organized according to the schoolwide essential question (Sizer). To address the essential question "What is race, and does it matter?" the eleventh-grade English teacher read *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry) as the in-class target text. In addition, students selected from a list of fiction and nonfiction to read independently. Groups were formed based on the texts selected. Four students chose to read the graphic novel *American Born Chinese* (Yang). They met several times a week as they read the book, with the essential question serving as the guideline for their discussions. After making some decisions about the pacing of the discussions, the group chose to focus on the parallels between the two texts and the ways in which the genres (a play and a graphic novel) dictated the story. One of the students later wrote in his essay addressing the essential question:

A good gauge of task difficulty has to do with the way the group approaches the task. If students merely divide it up and agree to meet again later to assemble the final product, it's likely that the task was not challenging.

> The characters of Jin Wang and Beneatha Younger had very different experiences, but would probably answer this question the same way. Yes, race does matter. Each tried to overcome, even deny, their race, but in the end their racial and culture experiences made them who they are. The metaphor of the Monkey King in *American Born Chinese* could be a lesson to both: the path to self-awareness begins with self-acceptance. Only when you understand who you are can you then decide who you will become.

Joint Attention to Tasks or Materials

Although this indicator might seem obvious, it is representative of the social and intellectual interactions that should be seen and heard during productive group work. Most classroom teachers know at a glance what is occurring in a group, quickly taking in the body language and joint visual gaze of the members. Students should be regularly leaning in, shifting attention from speaker to speaker, and actively using resources. In addition, the conversation that occurs within the group should serve as evidence that students are listening to one another.

FIGURE 1. Indicators of Success—Productive Group Work

Indicators	4—Exemplary	3—Applying	2—Approaching	1—Limited
Complexity of task: *The task is a novel application of a grade-level-appropriate concept and is designed so that the outcome is not guaranteed (a chance for productive failure exists).*	Task reflects purpose and what was modeled. The task allows students an opportunity to use a variety of resources to creatively apply their knowledge of what was modeled. Students have an opportunity to experiment with concepts.	Task provides multiple, clear opportunities for students to apply and extend what was modeled. Students have an opportunity to use a variety of resources to creatively apply their knowledge of what was modeled.	The task is somewhat reflective of the purpose of the lesson, but there is little opportunity for student experimentation or innovation.	Task is an exact replication of what was modeled, with little or no opportunity for student experimentation with concepts.
Joint attention to tasks or materials: *Students are interacting with one another to build each other's knowledge. Outward indicators include body language and movement associated with meaningful conversations, and shared visual gaze on materials.*	Students ask critical questions of each other, developing and forming personal opinions and conclusions. They are able to evaluate and synthesize information, as well as independently use a variety of resources to acquire new or unknown information.	Body language, visual gaze, and language interactions provide evidence of joint attention to the task or materials by all members of the group. Students can explain their contributions and the contributions of other group members.	Body language, visual gaze, and language interactions provide some evidence of mutual attention to the task or materials by most members. Students are not holding each other accountable for purposeful contributions.	Students divide up the task so that they can work, then meet near the end to assemble components. Body language, visual gaze, and lack of language interactions provide evidence of independent work occurring within the group.
Argumentation, not arguing: *Student use accountable talk to persuade, provide evidence, ask questions of one another, and disagree without being disagreeable.*	Students reach a better understanding or consensus based on evidence and opinions provided by others. Students hold each member of the group accountable by using questioning strategies and evidence to persuade or disagree. The conversation is respectful and courteous.	Students ask for and offer evidence to support claims. However, members continue to maintain initial beliefs or positions about a topic without considering the arguments of others. The conversation is generally respectful but some members may not participate.	There is a process in place for accountable talk. However, student dialogue is limited and there are minimal efforts to support the product. The conversation is generally respectful but is often dominated by one member of the group or veers off-topic.	No clear process is in place to facilitate accountable talk. Lack of structure is evident as students are off-task, in conflict, and/or unable to complete product.
Language support: *Written, verbal, teacher, and peer supports are available to boost academic language usage.*	Sentence frames are differentiated based on students' proficiency and need. A wide range of frames are available for students and students use the frames independently in academic language and writing. Teacher modeling includes the use of frames as well as academic vocabulary and high expectations for language production.	Students use one or two sentence frames from the variety that are available in a structured setting. A set of target vocabulary is available and used. Teachers model the use of frames. Students are encouraged to use the language support in guided instruction and productive group work.	Academic language related to the concept/standard is present. A frame may be provided. The teacher models at least once using target vocabulary or language frame. Students are encouraged to attempt using target vocabulary without opportunities for guided practice.	Vocabulary is posted but its use is not modeled. Students are simply told to use words. Language frames are not provided.
Teacher role: *What is the teacher doing while productive group work is occurring?*	Teacher is purposeful in scaffolding using prompts, cues, and questions and checks for understanding regularly. Evidence collected during this time is used to plan further instruction.	Some scaffolding and checking for understanding occurs but there are delays in corrections or changes to the instruction. There is a link to further instruction.	Scaffolding or checking for understand occurs but is not used to plan further instruction.	Teacher manages but does not interact with groups to scaffold conceptual knowledge.
Grouping: *Small groups of 2–5 students are purposefully constructed to maximize individual strengths without magnifying areas of needs (heterogeneous grouping).*	Groups are flexible and change based on students' proficiency, academic need, and/or content area. Productive group work occurs throughout the day.	Purposeful heterogeneous grouping occurs, which is fluid in response to students' proficiency.	Some heterogeneous grouping occurs, but homogeneous grouping practices dominate. Decisions based on assessment are not apparent.	Grouping practices are solely homogeneous and are done primarily for scheduling convenience.

Examples include interjections that affirm the speaker ("I see," "OK"), restatements ("If I understand you correctly, your idea is . . ."), clarifying questions ("What did you mean when you said . . . ?"), reflective statements ("When you said that, I thought of . . ."), and summarizations of key ideas ("So your three main points were . . ."). These are more than just social niceties, as they provide evidence that students are building conceptual knowledge of one another. In addition, these interactions are motivating to individual members, who are encouraged by the others to participate and are valued for their contributions.

Tenth-grade English students used the schoolwide essential question "What sustains us?" to explore the role of silence as a barrier to communication. Using a variety of texts, including *Silent to the Bone* (Konigsburg), *Speak* (Anderson), as well as the target text *The Color of Water* (McBride), students addressed the question by developing a multimedia presentation with a partner. Chris and Robert worked together to create a short video entitled "The Burden of Secrets." While sitting together at the computer one day, we overheard them talking:

> **Chris:** I have these pictures, but I'm not sure what order to put them in.
>
> **Robert:** Let me see them. You talk about each one and why you picked it.
>
> **Chris:** Good idea. [Begins displaying images on the screen. The first is a girl with tape over her mouth.]
>
> **Robert:** Wow. Why'd you pick that one?
>
> **Chris:** It reminded me of the cover of *Speak*.
>
> **Robert:** OK, but it's got to be more than that.
>
> **Chris:** Well, I also liked the way her eyes looked. Like she was scared to say anything.
>
> **Robert:** Like trying to keep a secret.
>
> **Chris:** Exactly.
>
> **Robert:** I'm thinking about a song we could use. That picture made me think of the lyrics. It says, 'No matter how hard you try to / you can't make the clock unwind to / The moment that you lied to yourself' [(Pillar)].
>
> **Chris:** Cool. Can you play it for me?

While the exchange may initially appear to be ordinary, what's underneath it is a conversation between two students who are closely listening to each other and building an understanding of one another. The task itself required interaction, and the students worked together to develop a presentation that made it necessary for them to jointly focus their attention on the matters at hand. Their motivation was obvious. From across the room, the body language and visual gaze were evident; up close the conversation further reinforced the shared attention to the task.

The ability to engage in argumentation and debate is a measure of an adolescent's growing ability to respond with logical and ethical claims to support or defend a position. In addition, he or she learns to channel appeals to the emotions in ways that are more sophisticated and nuanced. These skills do not emerge easily but take continued practice and feedback.

Argumentation, Not Arguing

Engaging in rhetorical language, both in speech and in writing, lies at the heart of the English curriculum. Students engage in persuasion, furnish evidence, ask thought-provoking questions, make assertions, assume a stance, and disagree with one another. In addition, they are asked to consider the position of others and utilize information to confirm and disconfirm beliefs. The ability to engage in argumentation and debate is a measure of an adolescent's growing ability to respond with logical and ethical claims to support or defend a position. In addition, he or she learns to channel appeals to the emotions in ways that are more sophisticated and nuanced. These skills do not emerge easily but take continued practice and feedback.

In response to the schoolwide essential question, "Can money buy happiness?" twelfth-grade students read the novella *Anthem* (Rand). The group disagreed about the dystopian nature of the book and its caution that collective wisdom is always a dangerous thing.

> **Gabriella:** I think she's right. I think it's dangerous when a whole society starts thinking the same.
>
> **Shaudi:** But shouldn't a society agree about certain things? Like when she talks about

freedom. Right here—"I guard my treasures . . . and the greatest of these is freedom."

Gabriella: [Reading] "My thought, my will, my land . . . ."

Andrew: But isn't that like what's happening now? Like that all the stuff that's messed up in the economy could be 'cause of the same beliefs. People were so much out for themselves that they didn't care what happened to anyone else.

Gabriella: But look at the start of the book. "It is a sin to think words no others think." I think she's telling us right from the start that unless you're going to be an individual, then you're doomed.

The group's overall tone is respectful of the positions of others, but they nonetheless use the text to support their claims. Their use of evidence is becoming more nuanced and they are able to challenge one another without resorting to simplistic arguments. In addition, they are listening to one another and considering the claims of others as they compare them to their own. They are motivated to read more so that they can continue to have these types of conversations with one another.

Language Support

To ensure that all students can engage in meaningful tasks, we provide them with various forms of language support. Without this support, some students will disengage as the tasks become too linguistically complex for their comfort. With this support, students feel successful and complete tasks with their peers. Facilitating students' use of academic English is critical as we recognize that they do not become increasingly proficient by listening to English; they need to produce the language as well. Unfortunately, as Guadalupe Valdés noted, too many high school students sit quietly in their classes and do not use English. When students are motivated, and supported, they use the language of the lesson, becoming increasingly sophisticated in their use with practice.

As noted in the rubric, language support includes the language we model as we read and think aloud as well as targeted vocabulary terms we have selected for specific attention. It also includes the various sentence and paragraph frames students can use when they talk with the members of their respective groups. For example, during a unit on poetry, we modeled using literary devices to unlock meaning. We also provided students with targeted vocabulary terms to use as they discussed and wrote poems, including *tone, ode, symbolism, alliteration, ballad, rhyme, elegy, irony,* and *personification.* And finally, we provide students with sentence and paragraph frames they can use when talking or writing. Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein recommend the use of frames (they call them *templates*) as an effective way for developing students' academic writing skills. They defend the use of frames or templates by noting the following:

> After all, even the most creative forms of expression depend on established patterns and structures. Most songwriters, for instance, rely on a time-honored verse-chorus-verse pattern, and few people would call Shakespeare uncreative because he didn't invent the sonnet or dramatic forms that he used to such dazzling effect. . . . Ultimately, then, creativity and originality lie not in the avoidance of established forms, but in the imaginative use of them. (10–11)

During the unit on poetry, Maurico, an English language learner at the early stages of proficiency who barely spoke publicly at the beginning of the school year, was overheard using a frame to say, "I disagree with you because it's more like personification. She make it like trains is alive." While he still has some errors in his speech, he is engaged in the task at hand and is motivated to learn more about the Emily Dickinson poems his group has been analyzing. When asked about the difference, Maurico said, "I don't talk before because I don't got to for the grade. Now, here, I talk to learn more better."

Teacher Role

While students are working productively on meaningful tasks, the teacher's role changes. Rather than model or question students, the teacher can join groups or meet with specific students to prompt and cue their further understanding. While there is confusion about these terms, we tend to use the term *prompt* to refer to teacher actions that facilitate students' cognitive or metacognitive work and *cues* to refer to teacher actions that refocus students' at-

tention. For example, the teacher may prompt a student using a question such as, "Does that make sense?" or, "What might be a next step in your writing process?" Alternatively, the teacher may cue a student using a gestural prompt, pointing to the word wall, a physical prompt to focus the student on an illustration that was previously ignored, or a verbal prompt such as "You might want to reread the section on page 154."

When teachers guide students, they strategically balance between prompts and cues, only reverting to direct explanations when the student continues to misunderstand. This is motivating as students experience productive success. When they are not with their teacher, they are motivated by the possibility of productive failure. Consider the following exchange between the teacher and a group of students who were stuck in their discussion of "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost:

Nathan: I don't get it. What is he talking about?

Stephanie: Going for a walk and choosing a road.

Graham: He says that he didn't choose the road that most people have taken.

Nathan: So. What does that mean?

Graham: Just that he didn't take that road and doesn't know if it goes to the same place.

Teacher: Think about it as a metaphor. Does that help?

Stephanie: We're all on a road someplace?

Nathan: We gotta make choices?

Graham: You never know what will happen because you have to choose?

Teacher: Look again at the line, "I took the one less traveled by." That's all I'll say now.

Graham: I think he's saying that he stood there trying to decide. And when he did, he decided to go where less people had been.

Nathan: Wait, like trying to be an individual?

Stephanie: Oh, yeah, like making your own way like the book I just read.

Graham: And it was the right thing to do, he says.

Grouping

The final category required for creating a motivating, productive group work task involves the number of students in each group. If there are too many students in a group, some of them are not motivated to complete any tasks as they know the work will be done by others. If there aren't enough members in a group, students begin to feel overwhelmed and give up on the task. Importantly, not every group needs to be the same size to be productive. In a given classroom, we have groups of two (partners), groups of three (triads), and groups of four or five. It all depends on the size that will keep the members of the group motivated to complete their tasks.

The good news is that students welcome a challenging task as they develop a stronger sense of accomplishment for meaningful work. However, the word *meaningful* is critical, as it truly is in the eyes of the beholder.

We form groups using an alternative ranking system. For example, in first period, there are 36 students. We rank them on their reading performance (not simply test scores) from highest to lowest. We cut the list at the midpoint and take some from each list to compose the groups. In the first-period example, students 1, 2, 19, and 20 make a great group. Student 3 works best with fewer students and has had conflict with student 21, so she is in a group with students 22 and 23. This grouping structure ensures that there is diversity in each group and that the groups are not so different that they cannot produce the work expected of them.

Motivation Requires a Meaningful Task

Motivation in learning grows in importance through adolescence, but it challenges us all as we try to locate the key to unlocking it. The good news is that students welcome a challenging task as they develop a stronger sense of accomplishment for meaningful work. However, the word *meaningful* is critical, as it truly is in the eyes of the beholder. It doesn't mean that we as English teachers should abandon what we need to teach; it does mean that we need to closely consider the task demand and the instructional design we use to support it. Students are eager to take on a difficult task, provided they are assured of the

support that comes from peers and the teacher. In addition, the environment must be one that views mistakes or errors as a necessary part of learning. The indicators described in this article should receive the same attention that our curriculum does. By raising the level of challenging work, and further coupling this with the structures and supports needed by students, we can increase motivation through raised expectations.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

ReadWriteThink.org's *Text Messages* shares YA text recommendations. *Text Messages* is a monthly podcast that provides families, educators, out-of-school practitioners, and tutors with in-depth recommendations of titles that will engage and excite teen readers. http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/podcast-series/text-messages-recommendations-adolescent-30214.html

Call for Manuscripts: *Action in Teacher Education*

Action in Teacher Education is creating an issue on media literacy education for the summer of 2011. What *is* media literacy education, among the many literacies, and how should teachers best approach it? What is currently available for teachers in media literacy education, both pre-service and inservice? For the entire call for papers and submission guidelines and concerns, please contact Gretchen Schwarz at Gretchen_Schwarz@baylor.edu. Or go to http://education.ou.edu/action/theme_issues/, but please note that the real deadline is October 29, 2010!

Julie Ruble and Kim Lysne

The Animated Classroom: Using Japanese Anime to Engage and Motivate Students

An English teacher, visual arts teacher, and social studies teacher collaborate on a project using Hayao Miyazaki's anime film Spirited Away *to inspire students to create short videos on an environmental theme.*

I thought using anime to learn about Japan was very effective because instead of taking notes and having a quiz we made it FUN!!

—*Brooke P., seventh grade*

Each year, seventh graders at Woodlawn School in Davidson, North Carolina, learn about Japan through a compilation of literature, history, and art. They are introduced to a wide range of ideas and materials: they study the Heian and Tokugawa Periods as well as modern Japan, the code of the samurai warriors, haiku and its components, and Japanese calligraphy and *sumi-e.* While this interdisciplinary unit is full of interesting subject matter, the seventh-grade teachers sought a more engaging foothold for students to become personally invested in Japanese culture. We therefore decided to harness the entertaining, inviting quality of anime, or Japanese animation, to create a collaborative interdisciplinary project. Weaving together the subjects of history, language arts, ecological sustainability, and visuals arts, the project used anime to introduce students to contemporary issues in Japanese culture, the process of literary analysis, and, finally, the technical considerations of animation (see fig. 1). In addition to motivating the students, anime added a new dimension to our work, allowing us to also examine ways in which popular culture might provide insight into the society that creates it.

Anime is at once a uniquely Japanese art form and a valuable classroom tool. Students are often already invested in or excited about the genre, having encountered it in their everyday lives (*Pokémon* and *Yu-Gi-Oh* are some popular examples). Even for those students who have not previously encountered anime, the perceived accessibility of animated films and the exciting technology used for creating animations can serve to invest students in the material.

In particular, the films of Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke* or *Ponyo*) are amenable to classroom study. (It should be noted that there is a wide range of subject matter within anime, including some with adult themes not suitable for classroom use.) Miyazaki's films often include classic adolescent conflict that has cross-cultural appeal to students. Students can also appreciate the sophisticated graphics and be challenged by complex themes. Students are introduced to realistic conflicts, such as the complicated relationship between humans and their environment, that present both sides of an issue to the viewer with no easy solutions (op de Beeck). These films are therefore simultaneously visually engaging and thought provoking.

The questions that guided the development of our anime project were the following:

- How does popular culture reflect the society that created it and, more specifically, what can we glean about Japanese culture from anime?
- How do environmentalism and nature, themes that are so prevalent throughout Japanese art and literature, play a role in anime?
- How do Japanese attitudes toward the environment relate to our own?

FIGURE 1. Overall Project Objectives by Subject Area

The following are the objectives created by individual teachers in each of the three main subject areas: language arts, social studies, and visual arts.

Subject	Objectives
Language Arts	Students will: ▪ recognize elements that reflect a particular historical, social, and cultural context. ▪ evaluate whether it is appropriate to use the established elements of a medium in one culture to evaluate foreign counterworks of another culture. ▪ identify environmental themes in the anime genre. ▪ create a script that demonstrates the relationships between our society and our natural environment.
Social Studies	Students will: ▪ recognize influences of physical geography, population, and religion on Japanese culture. • investigate events from important time periods in Japanese history. • organize key events in Japanese history into an illustrated timeline. • empathize with issues facing Japanese culture through role-playing activities.
Visual Arts	Students will: • investigate contemporary visual media. • collaborate with peers to create an animated film that visually conveys an original message. • choose appropriate materials and techniques. • utilize the technology of digital photography and movie applications. • present finished piece to a wider audience.

The culminating product for this unit was the creation of an animated film that examined our relationship to the natural environment.

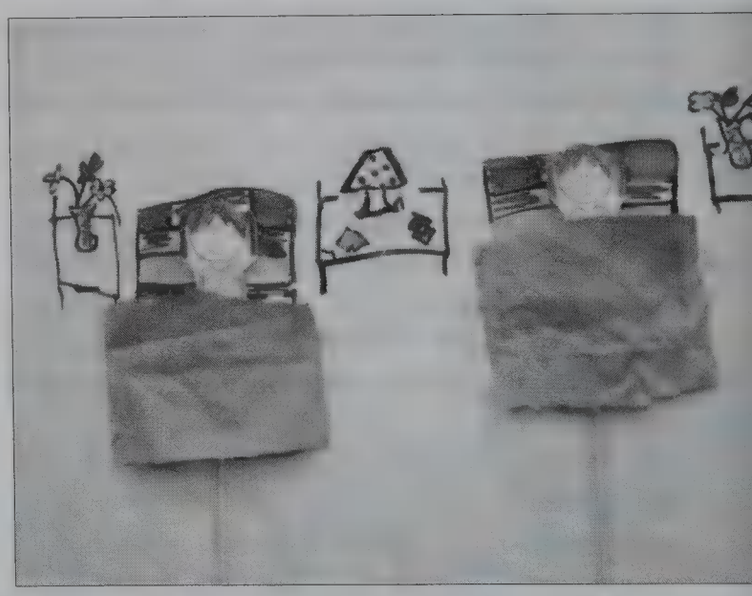
Anime in Our Classrooms

Woodlawn School is a private, independent school committed to producing independent, lifelong learners who are responsible, contributing members of a diverse global society. To accomplish this mission, we use an interdisciplinary, authentic, and sustainable approach to learning and teaching.

Interdisciplinary application projects provide opportunities for students to make connections between the subject areas while applying, synthesizing, and evaluating new material as opposed to simply memorizing it. We hope that working with the knowledge they gain in multiple subject areas to create products and ideas of their own serves as an authentic model of real-life problem solving (Tchudi and Lafer).

Woodlawn also attempts to take a sustainable approach to learning and teaching. An important aspect of the environmental education program at Woodlawn is applying knowledge to actively generate environmental awareness and solve issues (Smith and Williams). This focus on sustainability in teaching, learning, and living is often applicable in the projects we create and forms a basis on which students connect to another culture and a new form of artwork in the project described below.

Our anime project began with a foundation laid in the social studies classroom. From the earliest recorded Japanese history to the present day, art, literature, and reverence for nature have played important roles in Japanese life. To prepare themselves for the language arts and visual arts components of



A scene from a student animation on water pollution. This group used a combination of whiteboard drawings and puppets to create their animation.

FIGURE 2. General Timeline of the Anime Application Project

This timeline illustrates the duration of each portion of the project, as well as how the course schedules relate to and build on one another.

	Social Studies	Language Arts	Visual Arts
Day 1	Introduce Japanese religions. Discuss influence on Japanese art.		
Days 2–3	Illustrate timeline of specific time periods.		
Day 4	Discuss modern Japan.	Introduction to anime—brief notes and journal entry on popular culture.	
Days 5–7		Watch and discuss *Spirited Away.*	
Days 8–10		Introduction to script writing. Compose and submit anime script.	Analyze film clips. Discuss, demonstrate, and practice various techniques.
Days 11–14			Studio time to create characters, props, and sets.
Days 15–17			Photograph animations.
Day 18			Assemble film on computer.
Day 19			Record voices and sound effects.
Day 20			Film Festival

the project (see fig. 2), students delved into Japan's geography, history, and religions and examined how these relate to Japanese culture today.

In language arts, anime offers the ideal vehicle—in this case, a film—for accomplishing several objectives, most related to literary analysis. Film can be an inviting first step into literary analysis for students, and indeed, the study of visual media is an integral part of literacy in general. The National Council of Teachers of English in 1991 said, "[D]efinitions of contemporary 'literacy' must recognize that an understanding of visual, as well as verbal, texts is essential in today's world . . . . Inclusion of the study of media certainly should no longer be optional in our schools" (Piazza and Suhor 22). Thus, Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* became our text.

For our project, students watched and discussed the film and then created short scripts illustrating an environmental theme of their choice. This simple and efficient project accomplished myriad objectives (see fig. 1).

Viewing *Spirited Away* through an Environmental Lens

One such objective was encouraging students to evaluate the vehicle; that is, the students evaluated whether one or even several artworks can be reliably used to glean information about a culture. This objective was accomplished in the form of a journal entry in which students answer the following prompt: *Think of any American visual or performance artwork (books, movies, poems, TV shows, stories, music, etc.). In what way does that artwork serve as a window through which to view our culture? What do you think that art could tell other cultures about us?*

This prompt elicited various responses. One student explained that the movie *The Patriot* (2000), a film in which a family begins fighting in the American Revolution, illustrated values such as perseverance and patriotism in our culture. Other students cited various media (such as a Disney television show and rap music) that they felt did not

A scene from a student animation on the effects of war on the environment. This group used 3D figurines and a painted backdrop, as well as natural materials such as moss, to create their animation.

adequately showcase their own values, implying that they did not think all popular artwork was representative. Thus, we engaged in a discussion that explored both the value and pitfalls of using any artwork to investigate an entire culture. This meta-analysis of our project set the stage for using anime as a tool to glean information about some of the current issues facing Japan while appreciating that any culture contains diverse opinions, viewpoints, and values.

After laying the foundation for the appropriate use of the film as a window into Japanese culture, we accomplished the next objective, namely, to identify environmental themes in the anime genre. As an introduction to the film, we briefed students on the themes we should expect to find: for instance, the tension between traditional and modern Japan; the tension between domestic and foreign influences in Japan; environmentalism; and the main character's coming of age. Students created a chart (see fig. 3) in which to record evidence of each of these themes as we recognized it in the movie. By introducing the themes before viewing *Spirited Away,* we hoped to create lenses through which the students could actively examine the film. Students then raised their hands when they saw a scene, symbol, or event that they felt was constructing one of these themes and recorded it on their chart. We designed this "top-down" approach to help students identify and understand the plot components that construct a theme in a film; this process would serve as a scaffold for students later in the project when they composed their own films.

In keeping with our school's goal of increasing students' awareness of their environmental impact, we focused most heavily on environmentalism in the film. Environmentalism is an important part of Japanese culture, with roots in Buddhism and Shinto, and simultaneously a valuable tie-in to our school's curricular emphasis on sustainable living. By examining how the film represents Japanese citizens' interactions with their environment, we prepared students for when they would generate ideas regarding how Americans interact with our environment.

In addition to connecting in meaningful ways to sustainable living, environmentalism is also a simple theme for the students to recognize in *Spirited Away.* At one point in the film, a spirit believed to be an unlucky "stink spirit" skulks into a bathhouse, causing major panic and wreaking (pun intended) havoc in its path. The main character, Chihiro, marking one of the pivotal moments in her coming-of-age process, notes that the spirit is filled with refuse, from old bicycles to cast-off fishing line. On pulling this material out, the bathhouse staff reveals that the "stink spirit" is actually a beautiful, ancient river spirit who had been burdened with water pollution. This incident serves as

Michael M. waits to snap a frame of his group's animation.

FIGURE 3. Example of Student's Active Film Viewing Notes

Students created a chart in their language arts notebook to facilitate active film viewing and serve as a foundation for later analysis. After recording several of the film's themes, the students watched for scenes in the film responsible for constructing or illustrating those themes. We paused to briefly discuss these as a class before students jotted them down and continued watching. This chart is by Rebecca G.

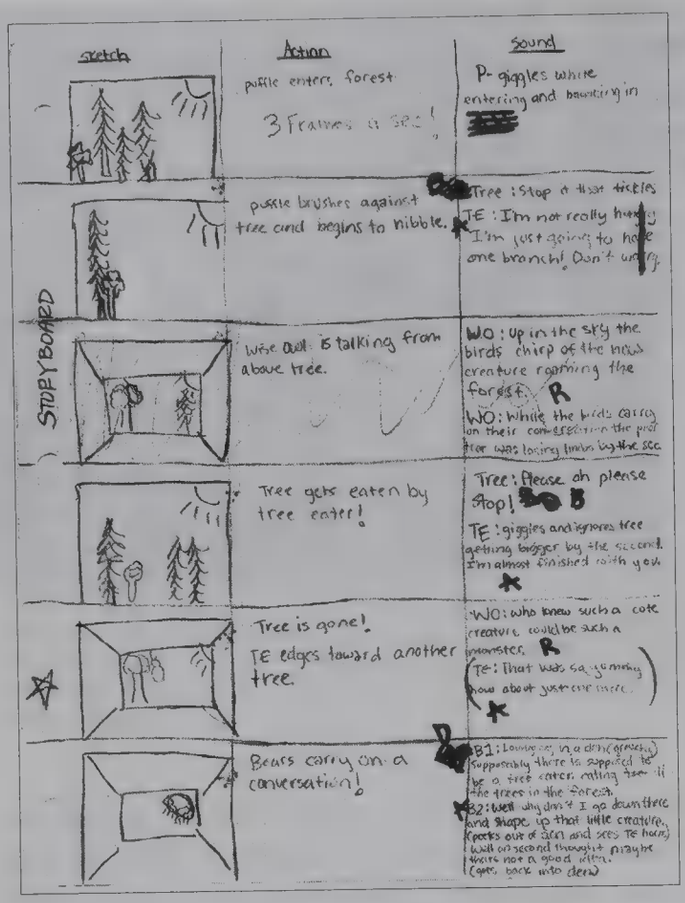
Chihiro	Japanese tradition vs. modern Japan	Japanese culture vs. foreign influence	environmentalism vs. greed
Beginning— -childish -whiny -annoying -melodramatic -timid	-Japanese road side shrines (spirits) -90's theme parks use Japanese culture as a gimmick for $$ -Chihiro's modernity "polluting" old traditions	-Audi (German car) -traditional clothes vs. western clothes	-money can't solve everything -greed causes problems -greed for gold -how polluted rivers are/ pollution -big spoiled baby
Middle— -asks for a job -helping sootballs -accepting her mission -bumbling -really fighting to succeed even though having trouble -getting braver			
End— -decides to help Haku voluntarily -grown up, caring, considerate, brave, mature			

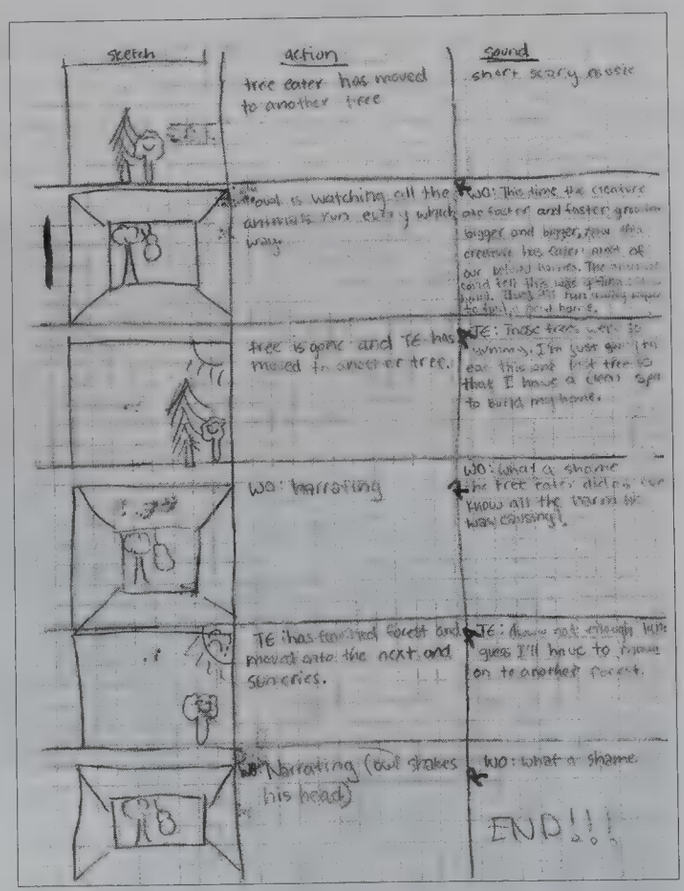
a bold judgment against carelessly damaging the natural world. Many additional events and character interactions in the film illustrate consumerism, materialism, and greed, all of which can be tied back to their environmental impact.

Immediately following the film, students examined how Miyazaki created his environmental message via teacher-facilitated small-group discussions. They tackled questions such as the following:

- The river spirit who came to the bathhouse was so dirty that the workers all mistook him for a stink spirit. He is only restored when all the rubbish is removed from him. What message do you think *Spirited Away* is trying to send?
- What aspects of Japanese culture or religion can you see in *Spirited Away*?
- Think about the representations of environmentalism and greed in *Spirited Away*. How

Natalie B. and Abigail H. practice with the puppets they created for their group's animation on poaching.





Students created a storyboard where they sketched each scene and planned the action and sound effects that would be included therein. This group's animation focused on the effects of deforestation.

would you describe the ways in which the film suggests the Japanese relate to their environment? What problems do they face? What feelings were illustrated in the film?

Students Become Directors and Screenwriters

After examining modern Japanese attitudes toward nature and the environment as presented in *Spirited Away,* students participate in higher-order thinking by comparing these attitudes to those in the United States. This analysis was completed in a manner that we feel allowed the students to interact most meaningfully with the anime medium: by writing a script that would then be made into a short animation in the visual arts portion of their project.

First, students chose a theme they wanted their animation to illustrate regarding how we as Americans interact with our environment. By choosing a theme before beginning to write their scripts, students were able to purposefully construct a message using plot and character elements in the same manner as Miyazaki.

Students chose a wide range of interesting topics to comment on, including deforestation, arrogance/ignorance about the strength of nature, how the wars we wage affect the environment, and how pollution affects our recreation. After planning the characters and plot elements of their scripts, students began to draft. During this process, we emphasized how we were interacting with Miyazaki's film, encouraging students to use an element of fantasy and similar symbolism to illustrate their themes. The students portraying deforestation, for instance, wrote a script in which a lovable, furry creature gnawing on a tree branch gradually turns into a raging monster, devouring trees for fuel and forcing bewildered animals out of their environment. Surrounding species as well as the trees themselves offer commentary on the events as they unfold.

By developing a short animation illustrating how we as Americans interact with our environment, students take advantage of a unique opportunity to join in a conversation with Miyazaki's work. At the same time, they hopefully gain an appreciation for his technique as well as a deeper understanding of the role environmentalism plays in modern Japan.

On further discussion and demonstrations of the animation techniques used in Miyazaki's films, the students learned more about animation as a visual art form. Students were presented with the challenge of devising alternative ways to create their films. To begin this process, the students viewed a series of short clips (found on YouTube[1]) that utilized additional animation techniques such as whiteboard drawings and moveable two-dimensional and three-dimensional figures to provide them with visual ideas for their own films. Allowing each group to choose the media and technique that it felt would most effectively convey its message resulted in a variety of creative solutions and a stronger sense of ownership.

This project can be engaging and successful for students and teachers with just a few pieces of equipment and a little technical experience. We provided each group with a digital camera, a tripod, and a computer equipped with the iMovie application; however, in school environments where such equipment is not available, there are other ways to experience the animation process. Students could use disposable cameras to obtain images that could then be transferred to PowerPoint, photo software, or an online photo-sharing site. Displaying these images as a slideshow with the shortest possible intervals creates an animated effect. In the absence of any technology, students may also draw the actions on cardstock and create a flipbook. Using these adaptations, the animation portion of our project is feasible in any environment.

In our implementation, students chose from a variety of materials to create their sets, props, and characters (whiteboard and markers; copy-paper boxes that may be used as mini-stages; an assortment of plastic figurines such as animals, people, and trees; modeling clay; magazines with images to create backgrounds and figures). Groups may also choose to use natural elements such as twigs and moss in their films, or to shoot their films outside.

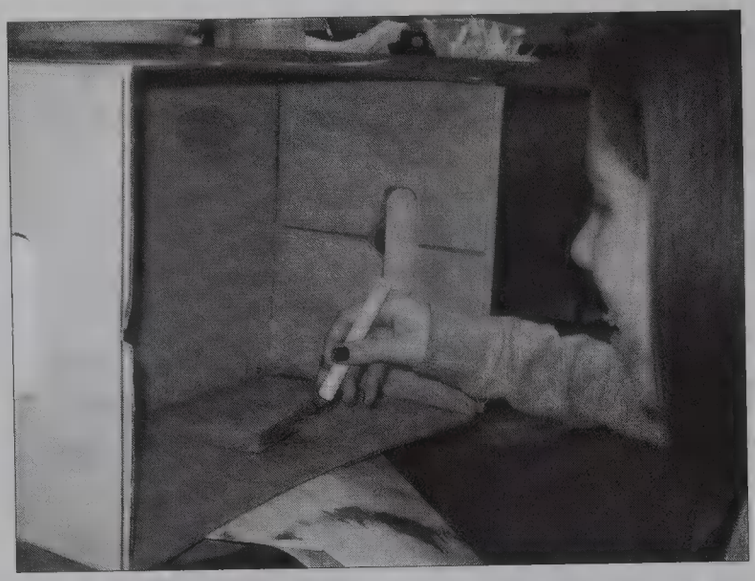
The students learned to appreciate the complexity of Miyazaki's art as they began to photograph each small movement of their characters. Before they began photographing their scenes in art class, they had determined in math class that popular animated films are usually made up of about 24 frames per second. They soon discovered that 3–4 frames per second created an animation effect they were pleased with and 180–240 frames resulted in a film that is about 1 minute in length. To begin the planning process, they created a storyboard that included sketches of each scene. They calculated the approximate number of photos they needed to take by timing the length of each scene in seconds and then multiplying that number by three photos per second. Because students had to shoot their film over several days, they kept a record of the placement of their tripod and the type of lighting they used (flash or no flash, classroom lights off or on) so their film would look consistent throughout the process. Finally, they recorded their voices and sound effects and adjusted the length of time images appeared on the screen to correlate with their voice acting. Students customized their ending "credits" with music and effects to conclude their films in a fun, personal way.

By developing a short animation illustrating how we as Americans interact with our environment, students take advantage of a unique opportunity to join in a conversation with Miyazaki's work.

Notes on Collaborative Work

The choice to have students work collaboratively was born out of necessity and broader educational goals. First, logistically speaking, the technical constraints of each student animating his or her

Clare M. adjusts a whiteboard drawing for her group's animation while Rachel C. waits to snap a photo.



Rebecca G. paints the setting for her group's animation on deforestation.

own film are overwhelming. Each film requires time, space, and materials to develop, so we found it most manageable to have groups of 3–4 students working on each film. In addition, using a collaborative approach provides students an opportunity to share ideas and skill sets, as well as learn how to problem solve, compromise, and to take ownership of their project and the message they want to convey. Finally, we found students were motivated by their collaborations and, for the most part, enjoyed their work with other students.

When asked to reflect on working in a group on their films, students recognized benefits and drawbacks. John W. noted that "ideas combine to form the greatest outcome" when working in a group. In addition to valuing the sharing of ideas, some students recognized the increased accountability of working with a group. Hannah G. said, "if you don't get along, that may affect how your group works, which will affect your *grade.*"

Students also struggled with group work, since it meant they could not have singular artistic control over their product. Clare M. voiced this frustration in her reflection, saying that group work "was hard because . . . I am strong and bossy." Interpersonal conflicts did occur. One group had difficulty agreeing on which animation technique to use, and thus ended up compromising and combining collage and three-dimensional figures. In another group, two of the students had lively disputes about who would take on which tasks, so as a team they made a list of the various roles needed and voted on who would fulfill those roles each class period. Even within these struggles, however, students learned valuable lessons about collaborating and sharing ideas. Celeste C. said, "[Y]ou always had to agree and make compromises," while Tristin S. noted, "Working as a team to write the script really made me understand what it's like to try to blend more than one idea into one idea." The struggles and successes of producing a detailed, thoughtful product within a group were ultimately a rewarding process.

Showcasing Our Work: The Film Festival

To culminate our study of anime as a vehicle for learning about Japan and, even more broadly, about environmentalism, the students had an opportunity to enjoy the spotlight and showcase their work. Students invited their parents to the Film Festival, during which they sampled Asian food, described the anime project, shared their animation sets, and debuted their finished films.

The Film Festival accomplished many valuable goals. First, the knowledge that their efforts would be showcased for their peers and family inspired students to take pride in their work throughout the unit; indeed, because they knew their work would be viewed, students wrote their scripts with significant consideration for their audience's understanding of and reaction to their scripts. Miyazaki created his films to be viewed, and thus the inclusion of a final presentation of our project makes the project itself a more authentic experience. Second, the Film Festival created a comfortable atmosphere for parents and students to interact about education in a positive way and might, we hope, increase parents' and students' investment in our curriculum.

Finally, because the Film Festival was a fun time of sharing, eating, and mingling, it served as a reward for students' hard work throughout the unit. Enjoying the fruits of their labor (or, in this case, the sushi of their labor) can, once again, increase students' investment in their schoolwork. And, because the reward of a film festival is a legitimate part of film production, the incentive is an authentic experience for the students, not an add-on.

Abigail H. and Michael M. upload their animation frames to a computer and prepare to compile them into a short film using the iMovie application.

Evaluation and Curricular Options

After completing our anime application project, we evaluated students based on the objectives in our individual subject area. In language arts, students were assessed based on the originality and creativity of their script, the successful development of a theme, and their ability to collaborate. Smaller components, such as their journal entry and film analysis notes, were graded based on thoughtful completion. In visual arts, students were assessed on technical quality of their film, their ability to collaborate, and their reflections about the efficacy of their media and technique in conveying their message.

As educators, we value the opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary teaching and learning. When each of us contributes our subject knowledge to an interdisciplinary project, it not only benefits our students but also enriches our own understanding of the topic. Connecting to adolescent popular culture becomes more manageable when we combine our knowledge of their world. Logistically, to develop and implement interdisciplinary projects, teacher collaboration is necessary. Grade-level teachers at Woodlawn share a common planning hour once per week and also communicate regularly through email.

In addition to the project components outlined here, we can envision many extensions to this anime unit. It may prove fruitful, for instance, to compare Western animation with Japanese animation (Napier). We imagine a beneficial comparison between *Spirited Away* and films with similar plot structures such as Disney's *The Little Mermaid.* While both show a young girl coming of age, students may notice more gray areas in moral conduct and more complicated ethical decisions in Miyazaki's work, versus Western animation in which good and bad is clearly defined. Even within Miyazaki's films, students can focus on examining themes other than environmentalism, such as the role of women and coming-of-age challenges. Finally, other subjects can also be integrated into the anime project. The emphasis on environmentalism and sustainability could easily be related to ecology components within a science curriculum. A lesson in mathematics could be devoted to calculating the number of photographs per second in professionally animated films to impress on students the complexity of the art form. Students could create soundtracks in a music class.

Students invited their parents to the Film Festival, during which they sampled Asian food, described the anime project, shared their animation sets, and debuted their finished films.

For us and for our students, popular culture served as a valuable lens through which to view Japanese society. The enthusiasm students displayed while working with anime in particular, an art form they enjoyed, motivated us as teachers. We hope that our experiences will help other teachers use anime to invest their students in the learning process.

Note

1. Some of the YouTube videos we showed students are http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqupJBlwOYw, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UyHTkQS168, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Im6JZ9eVBg, and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOqpfOtIOUo.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Gaining Background for the Graphic Novel *Persepolis*: A WebQuest on Iran" helps students gain background information on Iran to appreciate more fully the experiences of Marjane, the main character of *Persepolis*.
http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/gaining-background-graphic-novel-1063.html

2010 NCTE Election Results

In NCTE's 2010 elections, Middle Level Section member **Sandy Hayes,** an English teacher at Becker Middle School, Minnesota, was chosen vice president. Hayes will take office during the NCTE Annual Convention in November. Elected to a two-year term as Secondary Representative-at-Large was **Jeanette Toomer**, Jane Addams High School, New York, New York.

The Secondary Section also elected new members of the Steering and Nominating Committees. Elected to four-year terms on the Steering Committee were **Jocelyn A. Chadwick**, Discovery Education, Silver Spring, Maryland; **Katie Greene**, Milton High School, Georgia; and **Anna J. Small Roseboro**, Grand Rapids, Michigan (representative from the Conference on English Leadership). Elected to the 2010–2011 Nominating Committee were **Robert Gardner**, Edina, Minnesota, chair; **Calle Friesen**, St. Mary's High School, Storm Lake, Iowa; and **Annette Sample**, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

On the NCTE website, see additional 2010 election results and details on submitting nominations for the 2011 elections (http://www.ncte.org/volunteer/elections).

Carol Bedard and Charles Fuhrken

"Everybody Wants Somebody to Hear Their Story": High School Students Writing Screenplays

The authors describe how high school students wrote and produced their own films in a project in cooperation with the Austin Film Festival, and they draw conclusions for teaching writing in many contexts.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM—DAY

The room is full of students chatting about loudly.

The TEACHER whispers with JASMINE at the front of the class. The teacher is short and dressed in a flowery dress; Jasmine is pretty and reserved. The teacher nods and goes to the front of the class.

TEACHER: (Yelling) This is our new student, Jasmine. She just came from Southwood. So be polite and be quiet!

The class goes silent.

Jasmine sits next to JACOB. Jacob is rather dorky looking and tall. Jacob leans over to Jasmine.

JACOB: (Quiet voice) Hi, I'm Jacob. Welcome to Eastrock.

JASMINE: Hi, thanks.

TEACHER: No talking!

They both quickly look to the front.

The camera goes to the clock on the wall above them showing the current time.

So begins a high school junior's screenplay about a boy who is intrigued yet confused by the new girl. Over the next eleven pages, the boy comes to understand that weirdness, or "differentness," is OK—a message that is personal and important to Kitty, the screenwriter.

What did the experience of writing in a new genre afford students? For some students, it opened up the possibility for their voices to be heard by a wider audience. For others, it required them to reflect on and adapt their writing process. And remarkably, it caused a few students to consider a future in the field of screenwriting.

Storytelling Through Film

Writing a screenplay was an assignment that was part of Storytelling Through Film, a program sponsored by the Austin Film Festival, a professional film organization. In six weeks, students in creative writing and English classes first learned about the genre of screenwriting and then wrote original screenplays.

At the end of the six weeks, the students' final versions of their screenplays were read and evaluated by Austin Film Festival staff, who selected several screenplays to be produced.

The curriculum was a collaborative effort among the high school English teachers, who brought to the partnership their expertise in writing instruction, and the Austin Film Festival staff, who contributed their knowledge of filmmaking.

At the end of the six weeks, the students' final versions of their screenplays were read and evaluated by Austin Film Festival staff, who selected several screenplays to be produced. Students who participated in the program, along with others who were interested, came together to fulfill the many roles required in the making of the films: directors, actors, producers, editors, and camera operators. Introducing students to screenwriting—a new genre

to most students—was important because while students today are described as the natives of the digital generation (Prensky) and are regular consumers of media, they are often unaware of how media are produced (Buckingham). Dudley Barlow points out, "The transposing of a story from one medium to another is mostly invisible to students. Most have not even thought about this so it seems to them a filmmaker just starts with a novel or short story, assembles a cast, and turns the camera on" (62). Kaci, a student, validates Barlow's finding with her revelation: "For some reason, I always thought that the actors knew what to say. I now know that there is a brilliant screenwriter behind each movie. Movies are a piece of art, not entertainment."

Studying the Genre

Preparing students to write a screenplay involved immersing them in the genre. To learn about the features of screenplays, students read screenplays of popular films (for example, *Jaws, Slingblade, Clerks*), noting the essential features and acquiring the terminology, such as scene headings, parenthetical directions, and dialogue. Students also read a few pages of the novel *Jaws* and made notes about the author's tools, such as imagery and point of view; then students watched the first scene of the film and made notes about the tools used by the screenwriter, such as camera angles and lighting, to achieve the same effects as the author. Using this new genre knowledge, students analyzed and critiqued a variety of films, focusing on action (for example, in *Rushmore*) or dialogue (for example, in *When Harry Met Sally*).

Generating Ideas

After a couple of weeks, it was time for students to transition from studying other people's work to thinking about their own. Teachers engaged students in several activities to get their minds percolating. One activity included asking (and answering) "What if?" scenarios. Students responded to such questions as "What if a third-rate fighter had a chance to fight the heavyweight champion of the world?" (*Rocky*) and "What if an alien from outer space were befriended by a young boy?" (*ET*). Teachers also encouraged students to draw from their own lives. They posed questions to students such as "What is the weirdest thing that has ever happened to you?" and "What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?"

As students began to jot down possibilities for storylines, teachers provided a variety of strategies for structuring the ideas. One involved focusing on constructing character and conflict/plot statements by completing a simple sentence: It is a story about _____ (character) who _____ (conflict/plot). Another strategy required students to conceptualize their story ideas as having a beginning (introduction to character and conflict), middle (working through the conflict), and end (resolving the conflict).

Planning, Drafting, and Revising

As week three began, the (really) hard work started, as aptly described by Lawrence Baines and Micah Dial: Screenwriting is "difficult, challenging work involving writing, rewriting, and more rewriting" (91); students are compelled to think critically about images and nonprint media; they collaborate actively; they draw on and sharpen a variety of skills; and interestingly, reluctant writers potentially turn into prolific writers when the desire to make a high-quality film is in front of them.

The program followed a writing workshop approach, which allows students to engage in planning, drafting, and revising in flexible ways over a period of time. After the assignment was announced, some students latched on to an idea and began planning and drafting almost immediately. Others found themselves biting the ends of their pencils, waiting for ideas to emerge. Still others wrote in fits and starts, discarding more ideas than they kept. Interestingly, the winning screenplays were written not by students who wrote immediately but by students who allowed themselves plenty of prewriting, or "think time," to grapple with their ideas—often doing so outside of the classroom.

As students moved from drafting to revising, the teachers introduced storyboarding to help students "re-vision" their stories. As used by filmmakers, storyboarding is the process completed before a film is produced to help visualize the scenes, look for gaps, and anticipate problems. One benefit of storyboarding was that students had the opportunity to rethink their notions of how their story fit together; they could manipulate the scenes—adding, deleting, clarifying—as their story developed. Many students realized that storyboarding helped

with "big picture" thinking. Kitty said, "I used to try to focus on the details more because it seemed to make a good narrative. But now I might try to focus on the sequence a bit more."

Throughout the students' writing processes, collaboration—both with peers and teachers—was essential. While some students guarded their ideas initially, others found that sharing their ideas made a positive impact on the development of their stories. Eliana wrote about her appreciation for her peer's input: "Raquel, my friend, took a major role with the script. While working for an idea for the screenplay we came up with the ending. It was great to talk to her because if I had doubts I could speak to her. I based the character John Michael on one of her friends and Sara as her. Working in a group and with Raquel made the screenplay more funny, more authentic."

Portraits of Two Winning Screenwriters

Kitty, a Writer with a Message (and a Tail)

Almost immediately into our 90-minute interview with her, Kitty shared that she wears a kitty cat tail, likes that she's quirky and unique, and knows that her literature preferences—such as anime and manga—seem strange to some. When the program was explained—specifically, that some students' screenplays would be made into films and shown to others—Kitty recognized an opportunity to share her message with a wide audience.

Kitty's screenplay tells the story of a high school girl who is new at a school. A boy immediately takes interest in her, but he is confused by some strange happenings: he sees a chew toy fall out of her bag, he thinks she is eating cat food at lunch, he sees her acting like a rabbit in the hallway, and he spies on her in a dark room and she is covered in feathers. The boy consults with his friends because he believes she must not be human; they laugh. Although he tries to unravel the mystery, he finally approaches the girl, who has a logical explanation for each occurrence.

The idea for Kitty's story was drawn from her own persona: "I kind of built it off myself a little, except that I didn't want it to be specifically me. I wanted something different. I wanted it to make sense to people who don't really care for the way I wear a cat tail or like anime." In these words, Kitty hinted at the theme of her screenplay. Later in the interview, she more explicitly revealed the theme she wants her audience to embrace: "I want to open them up to a little weirder ideas. . . . There's no reason we can't all get along with others even though they may act or dress a little differently."

Although Kitty drew ideas for characterization from her own life, the plot did not come easily: "I kind of started writing like really brief kinds of drafts. Writing out different ideas. . . . I spent probably two class periods, maybe three, doing that. But I thought about it throughout the days also." She toiled over the intricate storyline because she had to create scenes that would appear strange but could also be perfectly normal when explained: "It was kind of tricky thinking of different ways to incorporate animals into a regular life and then give an excuse at the end." As a result, she decided to write scene by scene, composing and revising concurrently: "Well, you go from one scene to the next and you go back and try to build it a little more. Even before I had it all together, I was adding or removing something. Something that didn't seem to be important or help it flow or anything or got in the way." Another part of the balancing act was that Kitty wanted the boy and girl to like each other in the end; she wanted the screenplay to be not only about "differentness," but also "a cute, little, romantic comedy."

When asked why she was willing to work so hard to iron out the plot, Kitty explained: "I had a goal [to send a message]. Because it's something that I really wanted people to be interested in, I wanted to do my best." Clearly, Kitty is trying to reach an audience that is larger than her classroom teacher with a grading pen.

When asked why she was willing to work so hard to iron out the plot, Kitty explained: "I had a goal [to send a message]. Because it's something that I really wanted people to be interested in, I wanted to do my best." Clearly, Kitty is trying to reach an audience that is larger than her classroom teacher with a grading pen.

Karla, a Writer with New Confidence

Karla was the only sophomore in a multilevel creative writing course composed of juniors and seniors. Because she is quiet and reserved and views herself as a dancer, not a writer, she didn't picture herself writing a winning screenplay in a class full

of more confident writers; she felt her peers didn't expect her to either, since she "[sits] further back in the class" and "[doesn't] say too much."

Karla's screenplay tells the story of a young girl with a vivid imagination. The story begins with the girl sharing with her parents her most recent dream in which her father dies. She is terribly upset because her dreams always come true. With a heavy heart, the girl goes to school, and after school she is ecstatic to see that her father is alive and well. The story takes an interesting turn, though, when they arrive home and the mother is distraught. Viewers must infer that the girl's dream really has come true.

Karla thought of this story idea early on, but she worried that "the idea may have turned some people away" because it hints at infidelity. As a result, she tried more than 20 ideas before her teacher gave her the push she needed to pursue it. She also credited her teacher for providing some strategies and materials that allowed the idea to evolve. The "What if?" exercise caused Karla to wonder about a girl with a vivid imagination. Further, her teacher's recommendation that students should consider pulling from their own lives prompted her to think about her family dynamics, how she has a closer relationship with her mother than with her father. Karla decided to explore how an opposite family relationship might play out. Merging these two ideas helped Karla move from the planning stage to the drafting stage.

For the students, the six-week Storytelling Through Film program ended with applause, congratulations, and tears (of joy) during the screening of the films. For the teachers, the end brought satisfaction, reflection, and a realization about the benefits for students as writers.

As Karla was composing her story the way she had pictured it, she encountered a problem: "Around the part where the phone rings, I thought I should have it switch up. To me, it sounded too predictable how I was writing it. I was like 'Ok. I'm going to confuse my audience.' And that's how I came up with the surprising ending." At that point, she stopped the drafting process to re-plan. Perhaps Karla's willingness to go back to the drawing board, so to speak, stems from how much she cared about her characters, how much thought she had put into creating them and her desire to bring them to life: "I thought of the dad. It wouldn't make sense if it was both of her parents against her. There had to be someone who was her security blanket, someone she goes to, because me and my mom are really close like that." As she worked hard to rethink, redraft, and revise, Karla's relationship with her characters deepened and she wanted them to be portrayed accurately. In the end, she felt satisfied by what she had created: "This [film] could really interest somebody. . . . I guess the hard work paid off."

Throughout our 90-minute interview with her, Karla found moments to convey to us that this experience helped her grow as a writer: "I learned to not hold back an idea and not be afraid to write. Now I'll go with my gut feeling instead of pushing it off." Perhaps the defining moment in her transformation from shy girl to assertive writer occurred during her collaboration with the professional filmmakers: "They asked me to change the character of the mother. They said, 'Soften the mother up just a little bit.' But I didn't want to soften her up. It was important to me for her to stay as she was."

Implications for Teaching Writing

For the students, the six-week Storytelling Through Film program ended with applause, congratulations, and tears (of joy) during the screening of the films. For the teachers, the end brought satisfaction, reflection, and a realization about the benefits for students as writers. We highlight some of the teachers' realizations here.

Writers must feel *connected* to their texts.

The teachers attributed the students' amazing willingness to revise their work—without any prodding—to the connections that the students felt to their texts. Many students wanted to explore issues and changes from their own life experiences, past and present. Alice revealed the basis of her screenplay's concept: "I came up with the idea for my script from a cheer coach I had who was really mean to me and my friends for no particular reason, so I incorporated [this idea] as if it were my senior year of high school. I didn't need to do any research because I mostly got it from my personal experience." For Alice, screen-

play writing was cathartic writing. Students' taking inspiration for the content of their screenplays matches Peter H. Johnston's notion about identity: "[People] narrate their lives, identifying themselves and the circumstances, acting and explaining events in ways they see as consistent with the person they take themselves to be" (23).

Furthermore, when assignments move beyond the teacher as the sole audience and the grade as the purpose for completing them, students are motivated intrinsically to write, to create. Eliana aptly made this point: "Screenwriting . . . made it easier to talk about, to explore, and to show things that we normally wouldn't talk about."

Writers need think time.

Because students studied the genre for several weeks before putting pen to paper, they were afforded extended "think time" and pondered many possibilities. After all, David reported that he had "years of [his] own daydreaming" that he had to evaluate as material. And Sabrina shared her self-discovery as a result of having the time to let her mind wander: "I never knew I had this imagination."

Furthermore, ample think time gave students the occasion to consider the models available to them. Rachael revealed the qualities her multitude of sources provided:

> I came up with dozens of ideas, ending with a mystery/horror theme. I watched TV and came up with a husband killing his wife. I also wanted a chase and butcher scene in. That idea came from *The Hills Have Eyes.* I wanted it crazy like *A Clockwork Orange.* There came the medicine idea. And lastly I wanted the end filming result to be like that of *Fight Club.* . . .
>
> I researched police dogs and searches for bodies. I learned a lot from investigative TV shows, for example *48 Hours.*

For many students, the extended think time afforded them the opportunity to contemplate their ideas more deeply. Megan's reflection is replete with indications that time was needed for thinking: "It was just *really organic* where I got the idea. I *slowly came up with it* as I *thought of characters I would like to work with.* I *kept thinking* about *how I wanted the story to end* and *how I wanted the characters to react* to different events" (emphasis added).

Writers need new writing experiences to change and develop as writers.

Although students had been *viewers* of the genre, they had not been *writers* in the genre. The experience of writing in the new genre resulted in an appreciation for the craft required to write screenplays. Alice realized "the process is a little trickier than it seems."

Indeed, having to learn to write for a new genre pushed students out of their comfort zone. Each student seemed to recognize something (exciting and) new about himself or herself as a writer. Lucy wrote: "With a screenplay, dialogue is a main aspect but before I would rarely use dialogue." Dialogue will likely be a more viable tool for Lucy when she writes. But Carol's aha moment about herself as a writer was that carefully selected details enhance writing: "It made me realize how much importance little details are in order to get certain points across, like a shoulder shrug, or facial expression, and tone of how your character says a word or sentence."

Furthermore, by studying screenwriting, students learned that screenwriters write by envisioning their words playing out as images on the screen. As a result, students now have an additional strategy in their writing process toolbox. Recognizing that "if you can see it, you can write it," students have increased their awareness of craft—both on the page and on the screen. David and Amber are changed as writers *and* movie viewers. David said, "Recently when I was watching a movie, I thought about what the script would be like for the action for the screen." Amber shared, "Everything someone says or does I can imagine on a piece of paper and now I focus on simple movements and dialogue rather than on a movie as a whole."

[H]aving to learn to write for a new genre pushed students out of their comfort zone. Each student seemed to recognize something (exciting and) new about himself or herself as a writer.

The Power of Rich Writing Experiences

Perhaps the most powerful testimonial about the need to try on new genres of writing is that even though the Storytelling Through Film program

had ended for the year, many students were still thinking about the experience. Juanita wrote, "I may even try and write screenplays on my own." And Raquel shared: "Never in my life have I wanted to write one, but with this experience it helped me understand the beauty of a play and how easy it can be. In the future I would not mind writing another script or play because I really enjoyed it."

Screenwriting provided the medium and inspiration for these high school students to dwell deeply in thought and writing, because, after all, as Megan offered, "Everybody wants somebody to hear their story." Such rich writing experiences—in which students have the time to think and write about ideas that matter to them in new ways—motivate students to reevaluate their views of writing and their views of *themselves* as writers.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Audio Broadcasts and Podcasts: Oral Storytelling and Dramatization" invites students to explore Orson Welles's broadcast of H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* from October 1938. Audio broadcasts provide an individualized experience for listeners, who create mental images to accompany the words and sounds they hear. After examining Welles's broadcast, students create criteria for effective audio dramas and then compose audio of a scene from a recent reading. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/audio-broadcasts-podcasts-oral-901.html

Help Shape NCTE Positions by Submitting a Resolution

If you have concerns about issues that affect your teaching or if you'd like to see NCTE take a stand on a position you support, you have an opportunity to be heard! Propose a resolution that may be voted upon and passed at NCTE's Annual Convention.

For further details on submitting a resolution, to see resolutions already passed by Council members, or to learn about proposing position statements or guidelines other than resolutions, visit the NCTE website (http://www.ncte.org/positions/call_for_resolutions) or contact Lori Bianchini at NCTE Headquarters (800-369-6283, ext. 3644; lbianchini@ncte.org). Resolutions must be postmarked by **October 15, 2010.**

Lori Atkins Goodson and Matt Skillen

Small-Town Perspectives, Big-Time Motivation: Composing and Producing Place-Based Podcasts

A high school and college teacher collaborate to incorporate technology into an assignment called the Rural Voices project, for which students compose stories about their lives for a real audience.

We begin with a classroom snapshot. Chatter spreads like wildfire across the room. Students have been given the directive to list topics that mean the most to them. Angie, a sophomore girl twirling a few strands of hair, has so many questions that it is difficult to keep up with her.

The conversation begins with the absence of a topic on which to write. We discuss a number of possibilities: school, cheerleading, her favorite English teacher. Nothing sticks right away.

"Yes, you may write about anything you want. Remember, this project is called Rural Voices. So, any story that you would like to tell would be perfect for the project."

She asks if she can write a poem about a relationship that has recently ended.

"Certainly. A poem would be perfect."

The Power of Publishing Student Writing

Student motivation is difficult to measure, manage, initiate, and control. Teachers control many aspects of classroom environments, including student interaction and cooperation, by the rules and procedures they establish and maintain (Ryan and Patrick 437). But, there is often little classroom teachers can do to predict what will motivate students to move beyond the monotony of "playing school" and elevate their efforts to achieve authentic learning. If we are lucky, we simply have the opportunity, every once in a while, to experience real student motivation in our classrooms. When everything seems to work, when the engine that is our classroom is firing on all cylinders, when all we can do is move a couple steps back and take notice of what authentic, motivated, and engaged learning looks like, that is when we find ourselves right in the middle of something great, something meaningful.

The Rural Voices project, an activity of the National Writing Project, created such an experience for us and our students. For the project, we asked students to write about their hometown and then record their writing for a CD to be shared with classmates.

Asking students to publish their work, which can be done in a variety of ways (including orally presenting work to the rest of a class), is one way to increase student motivation. In the sports world, student athletes are willing to run laps, climb stairs, and practice before or after school daily in preparation for the big game. They are motivated because when they step out onto the court, they want to be as prepared as possible—especially for the audience of family, peers, and community members who will be cheering them on. The same is true in writing. Writing with the teacher as the only audience rarely encourages students to give their best effort. However, most students who know in advance they will be published—that their work is going to be showcased, just as an athlete's skills are showcased on game day—want to look as good as possible in front of that audience. When they know their work will be shared and displayed, they are more likely to take the time to revise and edit to create a more polished piece of writing.

Podcasting and Place-Based Writing

Another classroom snapshot: Microphones, connected with black cables, are set up in three different parts of the empty classroom. There is a light hum resonating from the overhead heating unit. Angie has more questions.

"So, what is all this stuff?"

"This is a program that captures the audio signal from this microphone and transfers it into my computer." My hands move almost automatically as I connect the components with black and silver cables. The hard drive of the computer whirs with anticipation as the final pieces of the audiological puzzle come together.

Angie seems nervous as I prepare for our recording session.

"Don't worry," I tell her. "You get as many takes as you need to get it right. Just be yourself in front of the microphone." I wait as Angie reads her copy quietly to herself. She paces in a small circle in the middle of the empty classroom that has become our makeshift recording studio.

She asks me if her voice will be posted to the Internet immediately.

"No, not right away," I tell her. "You'll have to allow time for me to put it all together." She seems reassured for now. "Are you ready?" I ask.

She nods.

One way to build intrigue in the classroom is to capitalize on teens' growing interest in digital media and user-generated content for the World Wide Web. Robert Rozema suggests student-generated podcasts might be especially effective for inspiring student motivation, in part because podcasting is a genre that naturally expands a reader's/writer's/producer's audience (31). While Rozema suggests that podcasting can help motivate students to read young adult literature, we believe podcasts can also motivate students to write creatively.

"Don't worry," I tell her. "You get as many takes as you need to get it right. Just be yourself in front of the microphone."

Another key factor in building interest and motivation for students is relevance. Relevance is especially challenging in creating school writing assignments, for which students often feel forced to respond to writing prompts that have little if any connection to their own lives. We have found that place-based writing—assignments that focus on or are shaped by the geographic area in which students live and learn—can further motivate young writers, as they write from their own experiences (Brooke; Jennings, Swidler, and Koliba).

Our Rural Voices project takes advantage of the motivating possibilities of podcasting and place-based writing.

The Rural Voices Writing Project

In his timeless "My Pedagogic Creed," John Dewey shares his belief that school should represent "present life"—the life students lead outside school. Further, Dewey believes that education that does not address the lives students live beyond the school can "cramp and . . . deaden." A place-based curriculum, such as is engaged in the Rural Voices project, can create the school-life connection Dewey finds so crucial for students.

The Rural Voices project was developed as a result of the research conducted by the Nebraska Writing Project (Bauman 1). The research conducted by site participants investigated the effects of place-conscious instruction on students' performance. Place-concious or place-based instruction also seeks to help students build an appreciation for their surroundings as they develop into active and responsible citizens (Bauman 1; Noddings 67). A place-based curriculum, including place-based writing, can address a number of issues and topics, including the social concerns of the particular community being studied (Bishop 66; Smith 587). One offshoot of the Rural Voices project was a presentation at the 2003 National Writing Project Conference in San Francisco where the presenters played cuttings of site-based writings that were written by students from Hawaii, Minnesota, and Kentucky, among others. Each section gave the audience a feel for what life is like in those students' communities.

The process at our rural Midwestern high school began with an introduction—and some listening time devoted to CDs the NWP had created for the project. At first, students giggled at the other students' accents and their descriptions of their lives. Slowly, though, the students began listening more intently to the stories they were being told, and they talked about why some of the stories were more vivid and "better" than others.

Once we informed our students that they would be contributing stories to the Rural Voices project, we heard the traditional claims of "I don't have anything to write about," and we began brainstorming topics. Before long, we had a list of interesting topics: family, hunting, tornadoes, farming, learning to drive, local sports teams, ice storms, gardening, raising pigs, and many others. Students selected two or three topics and further brainstormed using idea webs and other graphic organizers.

Once the students settled on a sufficiently narrowed topic, they wrote narratives or poetry to share their community stories. After sharing at their tables and revising, the students practiced oral readings before they recorded them.

Producing the Podcasts

Technology played a major role in taking the students' writing to a much wider audience. Students composed their pieces with the idea that each piece would be recorded in the author's voice. During the writing process, students were encouraged to consider how music and sound effects might enhance their original composition. These considerations varied in importance among all of the writers in the Rural Voices project, but it is essential to note that as students wrote, many considered including elements that would make their original writing a portion of multimodal compositions.

The production of each student-written composition was carried out in two parts: recording and postproduction. The recordings were conducted on site at the school over two school days. Students excused themselves from class for about five or ten minutes to record their writing. During the recording sessions, students visited with the producer about ideas for sound effects and music selections. Postproduction was completed offsite, where the readings, music, and sound effects were assembled and mixed together into a complete composition. The final recordings were burned to compact disc for the classroom teacher to share with the students.

The application of technology in this project was rather advanced. One of the teachers in this project, a doctoral student who volunteered to help record the works, collected extensive experience in audio production as the office manager and production assistant of a commercial recording studio—a job he held prior to becoming a school teacher. However, there are many reputable online resources available to help classroom teachers incorporate podcasting and other forms of audio recording into their instruction that align to all ability and skill levels (consider pointing your Web browser to http://www.apple.com/education/podcasting, http://fcit.usf.edu/laptop/Podcasting101/Introduction.html, or http://www.speedofcreativity.org/resources/podcast-resources/). With digital, nonlinear audio recording becoming the standard in audio production, it has never been easier to record, edit, and burn with ease.

The equipment used to record the students' readings included (1) a Marshall MXL 2007 studio condenser microphone; (2) a Mackie Onyx Satellite audio firewire interface; and (3) an Apple MacBook computer equipped with GarageBand, a multi-track, nonlinear audio recording program that is included in the iLife software suite. The Marshall MXL 2007 condenser microphone was selected for this project because it is a relatively inexpensive, large-diaphragm microphone that can accurately capture a wide range of voices in rich detail. It is not necessary to use this style of microphone, but microphone selection is perhaps the most important decision to make when recording the human voice. Ideally, a microphone used in an application such as this will provide the user with a sensible dynamic and frequency range for capturing most speaking voices.

Technology played a major role in taking the students' writing to a much wider audience.

A digital audio interface converts audio signals into a digital format that can be recorded, and later edited, by your computer. A range of digital audio interfaces is available and can fit most budgets; the Mackie Onyx Satellite that we used is about mid-range. Most interfaces connect to a computer through a firewire connection, which is a serial interface that can transfer information much faster than the common universal serial bus (USB) interface. The Mackie Onyx Satellite, like most audio interfaces in its price range, supports two audio inputs, which means the user can record two audio signals at once. The feature that sets the Satellite apart from the rest are the Onyx pre-amplifiers that are hardwired into the circuitry of

the interface. These professional-grade pre-amplifiers provide rich and warm processing that is ideal for recording a range of inputs, including, most importantly, speaking and singing voices.

Mac and PC users will find a wide range of audio programs to record, edit, and download audio files to compact disc or save as an MP3. We used GarageBand, a nonlinear audio recording program for Macintosh computers; however, many other programs, such as Audacity, Cakewalk, Ableton, and Digidesign ProTools, serve both operating systems. And, depending on which digital audio interface chosen, most manufacturers include a trial version of a comparable editing program for use with their product.

Success Stories

While many students fussed that they didn't have anything substantial to write about and then fussed even more at the possibility of recording their writing, the source for their complaints changed once the recordings were complete. We scheduled a day late in the school year to listen to the finished product, and for many of the students, the day couldn't come soon enough. They pestered us about listening to the CD nearly every class period until then.

When the day came, our typically rowdy class settled down extremely quickly. The students listened as attentively as they'd ever listened in our classroom before.

Students clapped for their classmates when each student's recording had been played. Once we'd listened to that class's CD, they started making requests to listen to specific works of students from the other classes, which told us they'd been discussing the project outside the classroom. One student nervously asked to go to the restroom to avoid hearing her own recording. We decided to pause and wait for her return. She actually seemed pleased that we'd waited, and she was relieved when they all gave her a hearty round of applause for her recording.

When the day came, our typically rowdy class settled down extremely quickly. The students listened as attentively as they'd ever listened in our classroom before.

Several individual successes come to mind regarding this project. Two girls teamed up to do a paired reading about life in their small town, an idea they had developed on their own. Another student—who had been fairly disconnected from the language arts curriculum—became intensely focused on the Rural Voices project. A student who repeatedly missed work in our class volunteered to play guitar as background music not only for his own writing but also for the other students at his table. To make sure that happened, he brought his guitar to every class, *for two solid weeks,* just in case the graduate student was there that day to record. We'd never seen this student so focused and so determined to participate in a language arts activity; previously, it was a rarity for him to turn in any writing assignment on time, but for this project, he wasn't taking any chances on missing it. This was an intriguing assignment for him because it allowed him to incorporate his guitar abilities into an authentic literacy project. Because his music became part of legitimate compositions intended for real audiences, he was legitimately composing for real purposes.

Another student was a born storyteller, but he rarely took the time to put his stories on paper. Instead, he arrived before class or stayed a little after the bell to share his tale of the day. It was always a good story, especially when it came to fishing tales, so we rarely discouraged him; if only he could put such enthusiasm and storytelling skills into his writing. Because the Rural Voices project provided him an opportunity to share his tale orally, he was willing to write out his story as part of the process. He chose to tell the best of his stories, about fishing with a favorite uncle, and he received an enthusiastic response from his audience as a reward for his efforts.

Concluding Observations

The success of the Rural Voices project in this classroom is an example of a compounded effort to motivate students to write, to tell their stories. On the surface, the technology and the use of music and sound effects to tell their stories was the initial hook to excite students to expand their creativity in their writing; there was also an internal motivation for each writer to identify how he or she is situated in our rural setting.

Take, for instance, the student who brought his guitar to school every day for two weeks. In this

particular case, the technology was a major motivating factor because he, and those involved in his group, found value in his talent to play the electric guitar, a skill that is often unrecognized in the "official" music classes held in a public high school—and rarely recognized in an English classroom. Not only did his music provide an original enhancement of his writing, it also served as an opportunity for the student to hear his music in a recording as part of an authentic communication. Experiencing his music from this perspective provided new insight for him as a musician and as a writer, insight that up until this project he had never considered.

The born storyteller also found relevance in the project, but for perhaps different reasons. Some of the projects completed for this creative writing activity embraced aspects of the rural community of which each student was a part. But, many students told stories of vacations and traditions that occurred beyond their small town. As one can imagine, these stories illustrated the awe and wonder of far-off lands. Each student who spoke from this perspective described the islands of Hawaii or the towering buildings of large cities with intriguing and rich detail. Others embraced their hometown in their writing, telling the tales of the rural setting in which their homes, families, and schools are located. The Rural Voices project provided a platform for those who originally thought they had nothing to write about, but students found that they had a great deal to share once they considered their unique experiences connected to the rural landscape. The students' Londonian tales of hunting, survival, and adventure took hold of the listener's imagination, while Rockwellean images of small-town flavor captivated the audience's sense of small-town nostalgia.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Connecting Past and Present: A Local Research Project," students connect to their school's history by researching one decade of the school's past. Through their research, students become archivists, gathering photos, artifacts, and stories. As a culminating activity, students create museum exhibits displaying the found items for their decade. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/connecting-past-present-local-1027.html

Jesse S. Gainer and Diane Lapp

Remixing Old and New Literacies = Motivated Students

The authors apply the concept of remix to literacy to design technology-infused projects that engage students in reading and writing in various social contexts. Specific classroom examples are described.

In the video game *DJ Hero,* players must physically operate turntables, or the game's version of turntables, while popular music plays and signals are given on-screen with instructions to the player on how to "remix" music from different sources. In this game, players are not doing the remix; that is left up to consultants—professional DJs hired to create remixed tracks with popular songs from artists who sold the rights to use their music. However, the simulation of being a DJ and scoring points in the game is the end goal that entertains players.

James Paul Gee and others argue that popular culture sources, such as video games, can be sites of critical thinking, and educators should explore new literacies linked to such sources. In this article we further examine the concept of remix and then discuss classroom practices that connect this concept from popular culture to school-based literacy objectives.

Remix, Literacy, and Motivation

Although not a new concept, remix has recently gained popularity in mainstream sources ranging from video games to newspaper columns and television commercials for airline tickets, fried chicken, and soft drinks. All these examples draw on a concept that originates from hip-hop culture and refers to the creative blending of materials from different sources (Mahiri). As in *DJ Hero, remixing* originally referred to the practice when DJs pulled from various audio sources and mixed the different tracks together to make a new song. Remixing is seen as a creative process that draws on prior knowledge and textual understandings (Rose).

Even though remixing in music is still popular and has expanded from hip-hop and is now common practice in many genres including rock and country, remix has also expanded beyond music. Remix is now used in media to sell a wide array of products, and fans of various forms of texts use remix to create "mashups," or blends, from different sources. Video mashups are one popular example of this practice, and many can be found on the Internet. An excellent example can be seen at http://www.rebellious pixels.com/2009/buffy-vs-edward-twilight-remixed. This short video uses scenes from the Twilight series movies and remixes them with scenes from the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to create a feminist critique of a character from *Twilight.* Although knowledge of each original storyline is important for good comprehension of this video, there is no question that the new synthesis, or remix, is an original creation.

In the field of literacy research, remix has been conceptualized as a form of writing and comprehending: writing and comprehending is remix (Knobel and Lankshear). Much like the New London Group's concept of literacy as redesign, literacy as remix positions readers as active meaning-makers who blend understandings based in prior knowledge and experience with new information as they construct new understandings from textual transactions, a point we describe in detail in another text (Gainer and Lapp).

Lawrence Lessig (cited in Lankshear and Knobel) made the analogy between writing done

by students and remix because in both writing and remixing the "writers" draw on texts of multiple authors to inform their work. This happens when learners take "words and texts and the tools of pen and pencil to make new texts, or to remix text" (Lankshear and Knobel 106–07). In other words, we draw on what we know—including the work of others—and rework this creatively each time we express something in this world. In school and out of school, young people are increasingly engaging in such literacy practices, especially with the increased access to digital tools for the creation of multimodal texts that include the mixing of still and moving images, print texts, and sounds.

Successful students exhibit behaviors identified through research as correlating with motivation, including having a purpose or reason for completing a task, being able to identify task goals, valuing learning, and perceiving oneself as being able to complete the task (Guthrie and Wigfield). Avi Assor, Hillard Kaplan, and Guy Roth suggest that students may become less engaged when a text or task seems irrelevant to their lives. The challenge for educators hoping to empower students to become self-motivated, self-directed, lifelong learners is to create classroom experiences that motivate them to participate and succeed while still accomplishing existing curriculum standards.

This often seems like a daunting task to teachers who realize that while a performance component may be motivating to students, many are better than their teachers at understanding, navigating, and remixing ever-changing technologies. Students may be more expert in the use of online contexts such as MySpace, Facebook, blogs, tweets, and wikis, contexts that show that today's learning experiences are not fixed within the parameters of the classroom. Our goal in this article is to share instructional examples that help teachers develop the confidence needed to design and support a remixing of literacy instruction that in many cases will involve students taking the instructional lead. We agree with those who suggest teachers use caution when designing "practical" applications of out-of-school literacies, or new literacies, especially given the potential to co-opt students' pleasures in such literacy practices (Alvermann, Moon, and Hagood; Lankshear and Knobel). However, we also see great potential in bridging students' out-of-school knowledge and interests with school-based literacy goals (González, Moll, and Amanti).

Lesson Examples

The following examples are just a few of the practices we have used in classrooms including a remix of literacy instruction that we have found ensures motivation and encourages success. Each of the learning tasks invites students to (1) directly, electronically, or virtually create a social community interface; (2) identify a task concept and plan; and (3) utilize media to physically, electronically, or verbally create, comment, and collaborate.

School Montage

In film, *montage* is a technique that refers to a rapid sequence of scenes or images used to underscore a theme. The sequence, which condenses narrative, is achieved through editing. Soviet montage theory, also called intellectual montage, uses images, often seemingly disconnected, that are juxtaposed to create new symbolic meanings in the minds of viewers. Sergei Eisenstein, a Soviet Russian film director, was known for his use of montage. He described the technique as a way to explode ideas into being by colliding images. He believed that the conflict created by forcing intellectual comparisons of selected images paralleled everyday thought processes in people and therefore caused viewers to actually form thoughts (Pincus and Ascher). In this way we consider montage related to the concept of remix; the creator of the montage is pulling together various sources to blend them in a new way that creates, or provokes, new thinking for the viewer.

Successful students exhibit behaviors identified through research as correlating with motivation, including having a purpose or reason for completing a task, being able to identify task goals, valuing learning, and perceiving oneself as being able to complete the task (Guthrie and Wigfield).

We employ montages in a lesson in which we have students use their school environment as text as they explore discourses present in "official" and "unofficial" school spaces. First students dis-

cuss discourse in terms of language communities within and outside of the school context. Next, students explore montage and view and discuss some examples, focusing on how juxtapositions of contrasting images and sounds can be a powerful means of expressing ideas and encouraging critical thinking.

Then, students use tools such as digital cameras and computers to create short montage sequences depicting differing discourse communities within their school contexts. Students use storyboards to plan their pieces and then create sequences using still and moving images along with selected audio tracks, all designed to provoke reaction in viewers and prompt thinking. Some examples from our students include pieces that compare active versus passive learning in classes; academic language versus nonacademic language; different social groups at school; and in-school and out-of-school learning. The students select topics based on their own interests and experiences. They work in small groups to plan and compose their montage sequences. Finally, we view each of the montages and use them as texts to spark our class discussions about language, history, and society.

One group of students, for example, created a short video montage that juxtaposed passive versus engaging school spaces, what they termed "boring" versus "fun" things in students' experience in school. Shots of classrooms with rows of desks facing forward with students seated, often with their heads resting on the desks, contrast with scenes from the cafeteria and hallways where these same students, or their peers, are animated and interacting with each other in a lively manner. Ana, Brenda, and Griselda, the makers of this video, explained in a class discussion that they do not feel that they learn when teachers lecture to the class about topics the students do not see as connected to their lives. These video makers stated that they believed that they would learn more in classes if there were more opportunities for students to engage with each other in discussion.

Students copied and pasted authors' photos that they found on the Internet along with pictures of themselves. They then created fictional dialogues based on real questions that arose from their study of the authors' works.

Literary Remix

In the literary remix, students focus on intertextual connections to build understandings of literature situated in particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. Students create mulitimodal texts to communicate their understandings of ideas that stem from their own research. The multimodal texts incorporate visual-pictorial, audio, and typographic print so that students can communicate understandings of ideas and realities around specific pieces of literature they have studied.

In one example, after reading works from Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, students made connections between racism and racial profiling in the 1920s and the same issues today. Students engaged with the ideas and writings of Hughes and Hurston as they discussed their works, made connections to their own life experiences, and then conducted further research on the authors and the 1920s. Students wrote responses to the authors' works as a way of introducing a particular poem, essay, or text to their classmates. These reflections were presented to the class, with each student selecting background music to accompany the presentations that they believed appropriately reflected the time period and the ideas being represented. Finally, students used Comic Life (a computer program that allowed them to insert photographs and include speech bubbles for dialogue) to create fictitious dialogues between themselves and Hughes and/or Hurston. Students copied and pasted authors' photos that they found on the Internet along with pictures of themselves. They then created fictional dialogues based on real questions that arose from their study of the authors' works. They speculated answers the authors might have given based on their understandings of their writings. An example of a chat between Hurston and one student (Angul), which she illustrated through Comic Life, is included as Figure 1. An assignment like this certainly has the potential to expand students' understandings about race, history, society, and their participation as members of society.

Story of Our Stuff

After a close reading of the website *The Story of Stuff* (Leonard; http://www.storyofstuff.com/), students investigate and "retell" the life cycles of selected

FIGURE 1. Angul and Zora Chatting: A Literacy Remix Work Sample

items that are a part of their daily lives. Following the frame of what Annie Leonard calls the materials economy, students track the history of products from extraction to production, distribution, consumption, and finally disposal. As students investigate product histories and rewrite them as research papers and then stories, they have the opportunity to critically analyze texts often taken for granted and left unquestioned. The process of such work can help students become critical consumers and critical readers who understand the importance of digging for deeper understandings than what is often at face value. Others have used the online film *The Story of Stuff* to spark similar critical dialogue with students about consumption and its impact on the environment and people worldwide (Cuff and Statz).

After selecting specific products that they use on a daily basis, small groups of students set out to investigate the histories of the items. Students used the Internet, newspaper articles, television, email, and any other sources at their disposal to try to trace the origins of all the materials that compose their selected product. Ken Lindblom argues that students should "become savvy about their habits of consumption so that they make more effective choices and so that they are aware of what systems of meaning and of production they are supporting" (11). Similarly, we find that students begin to understand the societal consequences, and the power, of their choices as consumers after focused study on product life cycles.

Our students have chosen items from electronic devices such as cell phones and MP3 players to other things such as energy bars, socks, and hair products. After establishing the composition of their products, students try to determine the path it took before ending up in their possession. Starting with extraction from the earth, students document everything they can find about the item through the consumer process until disposal. Students are given a research template to help guide their writing of papers that detail issues involving human and environmental impacts, conditions of labor for people involved in the production and distribution of the products, and issues around the consumption and disposal of the items.

After completing the research papers, students create videos or comic books that tell the stories of the "stuff" they investigated. Their stories are fictional accounts of individual products based on the facts they collected related to the life cycle of the product. Their stories are then shared with the other students in the class and used to generate class discussion.

In one example, a student selected a popular brand of socks. Though he was unable to get any concrete information from the company, Philip generalized based on the label that stated the socks were made in China and composed of cotton. When exploring possibilities for "extraction," Philip learned from an Internet source that a great deal of cotton is cultivated in Uzbekistan. This led Philip to investigate labor conditions in a country he had not heard of before starting this project. He learned the geographic location of the country and that the country has been implicated for widespread use of child labor. Similarly, when exploring production, he was unable to find specific information about the socks, but he did learn about working conditions in many factories in China. Philip's case was quite typical of students' experiences when exploring product histories. Many students were unable to find specific information about product histories even after contacting the companies that produce the items. Students were able to generalize based on the information they did find. In addition, that companies were reluctant to share information, often citing proprietary security, led to interesting class discussions regarding the rights of consumers. This connection-making and critical reflection is directly connected to reading comprehension and the type of engagement we hope students will develop when transacting with all texts.

Documentary Poetry

Documentary poetry refers to poetry that informs or is informed by real-world events. This form uses poetry as testimony to document unjust social issues, especially relating to the stories of people whose voices are often silenced or unheard in mainstream news sources.

Not only does documentary poetry chronicle social injustice, but it also calls readers to action against unjust situations that exist in the world. Some examples of poets we consider to use this style include Walt Whitman, Nikki Giovanni, Ernesto Cardenal, Pablo Neruda, Martin Espada, June Jordan, Alan Ginsberg, and many others. There are

many parallels between such poets and artists who create critical hip-hop (Morrell) and we include many musicians, including hip-hop and other genres, in our examination of this area. Some musicians/poets we have used include Mos Def, Public Enemy, Lauryn Hill, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, and Pete Seeger—just to name a few.

When engaging students in remix literacy practices with documentary poetry, we start by having them read and analyze various mentor texts, including an array of texts from the artists/poets mentioned above. We ask students to discuss the content of the works as well as the many poetic devices employed by the authors. Our discussions are often accompanied by minilessons that highlight different social/historical issues or certain devices, such as rhyme or repetition. In our class discussions, we try to focus students' attention on how and why each author may have chosen certain topics and the specific word choices and ways of communicating their messages. After analyzing a variety of documentary poems, students work in groups to investigate social issues that they have selected. Students have selected issues ranging from pollution to racism, police brutality, teen pregnancy, and world hunger. After conducting research on their selected topics and writing research papers, students write poetry loosely following the qualities they have learned about in their studies of documentary poetry. Finally, students use computer software to create digital poems incorporating still and moving pictures, text on-screen titles, and audio tracks including recitations of their poetry often accompanied by background music. We find their sharing and discussing of their poems to be lively and engaging.

In one powerful example, Joey focused on police brutality. After a few highly publicized instances of shootings by local police in the central Texas city where Joey lives, he decided to focus on a case that received national attention that he believed paralleled what was happening in his community. Joey chose to write a poem about Sean Bell, an unarmed man who was shot repeatedly and killed by New York City police on the morning of the day he was to get married. Joey used factual information that he found on Internet sites as well as newspaper articles to compose a poem that critiqued a system that he felt allowed police violence to often go unquestioned. The final lines of his poem capture the anger and frustration felt by Joey and many others in regards to this issue:

> 50 shots fired at a young man with no gun in his waist.
> So the sound of the blue rounds from the officer's gun replaced the wedding bells that were later to come.
> And not one was found responsible . . .
> I mean guilty.

Joey's example illustrates the powerful engagement students have with texts when they are given opportunities to read and write about real issues of real consequence that they find in their world. Through remixing of news items and often controversial issues, students create new texts with voice and passion.

Conclusion

The various lesson examples we have shared are just a few ideas about how to incorporate remix into our language arts classrooms. The central point of such instruction is to help students understand that readers are active constructors of meaning and draw on all that they know when they process and make sense of what they have read. Anytime we read, we remix old understandings with new ones as we experience and try to understand our worlds.

With technological developments, the texts we encounter in our daily lives in and out of the workplace are constantly changing and expanding. As educators we must broaden what we consider "text" for our reading and writing lessons. However, an inclusion of new literacies need not, and should not, come at the expense of attention to traditional ones. We still live in a world where literacy in print-based typographic text is a must for upward mobility. It is our job as educators to continue to push students to become literate—but now with even more modes of expression.

Students use computer software to create digital poems incorporating still and moving pictures, text on-screen titles, and audio tracks including recitations of their poetry often accompanied by background music.

We believe the idea of remix has a great deal to offer educators, especially language arts teachers. We introduced this concept, and this article, using the

example of *DJ Hero.* While we recognize the excitement around such a game and we value many aspects of the game for their potential for players' critical engagement, it doesn't quite maximize potential for critical thinking and remixing. Rather than a game that simulates remixing for players to follow material that has been created by experts, what draws us to this construct is the creative process that defines Web 2.0 mindsets (Lankshear and Knobel 41). Consumers need not be passive recipients of expert-generated knowledge and products. Instead, technologies allow us to take much more active roles in the creation of new materials using existing ones. This creative outlet is at the heart of remix and is what we as educators need to embrace to motivate students to continually grow as learners. EJ

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Weaving the Old into the New: Pairing *The Odyssey* with Contemporary Works," students choose paired characters from the texts, complete a graphic organizer, and place their characters in hypothetical contemporary situations. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/weaving-into-pairing-odyssey-1041.html

Amber M. Simmons and Melissa Page

Motivating Students through Power and Choice

Describing an assignment for which groups of students designed and assessed projects on Arthur Miller's The Crucible, *a high school teacher and a doctoral student show how curricular freedom can empower students.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "our own experience instructs us that the secret of Education lies in respecting the pupil. It is not for you to choose what he should know, what he shall do" (102). As teachers of American Literature, we admire Emerson's faith in the individual and find Thoreau's resistance to conformity an act of daring bravery, and as we think about these enlightened men and their ideals in relation to students, we wonder: If given the opportunity, would individual freedom and choice motivate students in the 21st-century classroom?

If allowed the time to adjust to such power and guidance on how to use it, we think that individual freedom would motivate students to achieve scholastic excellence and embrace personal empowerment. Teacher control in the classroom has constructed an environment in which we no longer trust students, and they do not trust themselves. We have faith that students want to learn despite the incredible resistance we all face in the classroom. Students aren't resisting learning; they're resisting the whole context in which they are taught. This resistance has encouraged us to examine how changing the power structure in classrooms can encourage creativity and motivate students to have power over their learning.

Theoretical and Methodological Background

Both progressive education and critical pedagogy support the theory that a democratic classroom will lead to more engaged students. George S. Counts critically defines progressive education as education that has "focused attention squarely upon the child; it has recognized the fundamental importance of the interest of the learner; it has defended the thesis that activity lies at the root of all true education; it has conceived learning in terms of life situations and growth of character; it has championed the rights of the child as a free personality" (258). William Kilpatrick defines it as a pedagogy where "clues to significant content can be found within the learner and can be developed fully in collaboration with a mature adult who fosters self-direction and independent thought" (qtd. in Van Til 3). However, many critics such as Williamson M. Evers use frightening language suggesting that school will be all "playing" and there will be no room for core (privileged) subjects, nor will there be any need for hard work because it will all be easy, fun, playtime. We think that Evers's criticism is a serious underestimation of students.

William Glasser's "control theory" exemplifies his attempts to empower students and give them voice by focusing on their basic, human needs: Unless students are given power, they may exert what little power they have to thwart learning and achievement through inappropriate behavior and mediocrity. Thus, it is important for teachers to give students voice, especially in the current educational climate, which is dominated by standardization and testing.

Adopting any form of progressivism including critical pedagogy is confusing, laborious, risky, and complicated; however, until our current oppressive climate in education changes, individual teachers can work at the grassroots level by creating

opportunities that allow us to motivate and work *with* adolescents to ask questions, create knowledge, examine social issues, and further opportunities for critical thinking.

The project presented in this article allowed students to re-present thematic knowledge from a district-sanctioned reading, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible.* Students were given the opportunity to establish the terms of the project by creating the rubric collaboratively as well as to represent Miller's themes as contextual problems in their own lived experiences. Our desired goal was to engage students by inviting them, as Ira Shor does, "to invent with me a negotiated curriculum in a mutual process that repositions us, opening the chance to pass through the membrane separating them and me" (19). Our goal was to begin creating an environment in which students are motivated to perform at a high level by sharing power with them and giving students responsibility and control over their educational experience.

As this project was an attempt to help motivate students through a change in their perception of power in the classroom, we responded by telling them that they had complete control over how their group wanted to portray a theme in *The Crucible.*

Introduction of the Self-Directed Project

As we introduced the shared power structure of a democratic classroom, we explained to the students that there was only one requirement to the project: reflect a theme portrayed in *The Crucible.* We began by telling them that they could do "whatever they want" to reflect the theme, but they should focus on their strengths as a group and ensure that each group member had a significant role in the presentation.

The students found it difficult to think differently from the ways in which they had been previously schooled. Their first question was, "What do you mean by 'anything you want'?" As this project was an attempt to help motivate students through a change in their perception of power in the classroom, we responded by telling them that they had complete control over how their group wanted to portray a theme in *The Crucible.* We then gave them examples of what they could do: skit, video, rap, collage, cartoon, puppet show, song, dance, multigenre project, etc. What each group chose, we suggested, should depend on the strengths of the group members. Some students were enthusiastic, but others were in shock over the lack of rules and restrictions.

Student Groups as a Tool for Motivation

We constructed heterogeneous groups to promote a democratic environment and motivate students in the class. Glasser gives the following reasons for heterogeneous grouping:

1. Students can achieve "a sense of belonging." Teams should be teacher selected "so that they are made up of a range of low, middle, and high achievers."
2. "Belonging provides the initial motivation for students to work." As students experience scholastic success, students who were previously less motivated "begin to sense that knowledge is power and then want to work harder."
3. "The stronger students find it need-fulfilling to help the weaker ones" because successful teamwork leads to friendship.
4. Because "whatever they contribute [now] helps," weaker students are more likely to contribute to the team. When faced with a task to do on their own, "a little effort got them nowhere."
5. "Students need not depend only on the teacher. They can depend a great deal on themselves, their own creativity and other members of their team." By relying on one another and working independent of the teacher, students gain "both power and freedom."
6. "Learning-teams can provide the structure that will help students to get past the superficiality that plagues our schools today." Without heterogeneous grouping, "there is little chance for any but a few students to learn enough in depth to make the vital knowledge-is-power connection."
7. "The teams are free to figure out how to convince the teacher and other students (and parents) that they have learned the material. Teachers will encourage teams to offer evidence (other than tests) that the material has been learned."
8. "Teams will be changed by the teacher on a regular basis so that all students will have a chance to be on a high-scoring team." (75–76)

Glasser's reasoning for the creation of heterogeneous groups suggests that the best motivator for students is cooperation and friendly competition with their peers.

Motivating through Collaboration

Another way we motivated students to achieve high standards was to give them the power to set those standards for themselves; therefore, a class-created grading system was needed. In *When Students Have Power: Negotiating Authority in a Critical Pedagogy,* Shor states, "I also took the initiative in distributing responsibility for evaluation. . . . [I asked the students] to do written assessments of the oral project reports, which I then relayed to the groups. In addition, I gave each group my own written evaluation and a group grade" (163). We followed Shor's lead by having the class collaborate and create expectations in the form of a rubric.

The entire class would grade the quality of each group presentation based on the class-created rubric, and the teacher would also give a separate grade. The average of the teacher's grade with the class's grade produced each group's final grade. Creating the rubric together allowed the groups to discuss the quality they wanted to see from their classmates' presentations and what they thought they were realistically capable of producing by the deadline. This power alone made students more secure in their ability to be successful in fulfilling the project requirements, motivating them to be creative in their presentation to the class and less focused on "what the teacher wants." The rubric they created (see fig. 1) was similar to any teacher-created rubric, but the language was different and the point value assigned to each requirement is based on what the students thought was most important: creativity. Composing the rubric in the students' language also helped students in grading presentations because they did not have to decipher the teacher's language.

Our class-created rubric shows how students have the ability to set high standards for themselves and motivate one another by holding their peers accountable for those standards; accountability need not be forced on students, disproving Evers's criticism of democratic and progressive classrooms as all play and no work.

FIGURE 1. Class Created Rubric for *The Crucible* Group Projects

Creativity _____/30
Original idea, unique presentation, visually appealing, entertaining

Quality _____/25
Quality effort is apparent.
Theme is accurately represented.
If there are props, they are explained and used effectively and aren't just "there."
Facts are correct, group members are knowledgeable about their topic/theme.

Group Participation _____/20
All group members have a substantial role in the presentation/project.
It is apparent that they worked as a group, and one person didn't do all the work.
They engaged the audience.

Organization _____/15
All group members know their role in the presentation.
Presentation "flows" and is not choppy or disjointed.
It is obvious that the group rehearsed.

Presentation _____/10
Voice projection, eye contact, no gum chewing, etc.
No "ummmm" or "like, you know."
There was appropriate energy.
The presentation was between 8–15 minutes.

Comments: **Total:** _____/100

Motivating through Creative Freedom

When first beginning their group projects, students resisted freedom and sought out teacher leadership and approval. Most of the time, the questions began with, "Is it OK if we . . . ?" When faced with this question, we tried to direct it back to the group. We asked what the other group members thought of the idea, if it fulfilled the requirements on the class-created rubric, and if it portrayed a theme from *The Crucible.* By posing these questions, students were motivated to answer their own questions by anticipating the teacher's questions.

Our class-created rubric shows how students have the ability to set high standards for themselves and motivate one another by holding their peers accountable for those standards; accountability need not be forced on students.

The actual presentations varied in quality and creativity and were graded accordingly by the stu-

dents. Each group chose a theme that they found most interesting in the play, such as how revenge can backfire, how guilt can destroy a person's self-perception, how superstition if not balanced with logic can lead to chaos, and how corrupted authority figures can manipulate others to conceal the truth. To portray these themes and others, students made videos that parodied the play or portrayed a modern interpretation. Students created multigenre projects that included raps about their theme, cartoons telling the fate of the characters after the play ended, drawings that portrayed a theme, and skits of scenes they thought should have been added to the play. Most groups composed a variety of genres to ensure that all group members' talents were utilized. Having been given the freedom to choose how they would represent a theme, the students produced more creative, interesting, and insightful work than anything we could have told them to do.

When given high expectations set by their peers and the faith of the teacher in their ability to be fair and accurate, students can assess themselves in a manner that appropriately represents ability and effort.

Motivating through Equality

As stated earlier, the average of all class grades was averaged with the teacher's individual grade to obtain each group's final score. Out of 18 groups, the grades broke down as follows:

- The number of times the average class grade was **higher** than teacher's grade: 9. (In these cases, the average difference between the teacher's grade and the average class grade was 2.4 points out of 100 total points.)
- The number of times the average class grade was **lower** than the teacher's grade: 4. (In these cases, the average difference between the teacher's grade and the average class grade was 3 points out of 100 total points.)
- The number of time the average class grade was **the same** as the teacher's grade: 5.

The small variance in the average between the class's grade and the teacher's grade shows that there is no need for the teacher to take absolute control of the classroom to get accurate results. When you "respect the child," the child will respect the task assigned (Emerson 102). When given high expectations set by their peers and the faith of the teacher in their ability to be fair and accurate, students can assess themselves in a manner that appropriately represents ability and effort. However, to motivate students to grade fairly, the grade the class gives must have meaning, or the teacher is not showing genuine trust in the students. In addition, "if 'student empowerment' is going to be meaningful, students not only need to be involved in some of the problem-solving and posing practices . . . , but teachers must fundamentally change their methods" (Peterson 374). In this case, the class's averaged grade and the teacher's grade were weighted the same and had equal importance to the group's final grade. Knowing that their voices counted motivated students to express their ideas and act in a responsible manner.

Using Class Surveys as a Tool for Future Motivation

When the project was completed, students were asked in a survey designed according to Shor's model if they had any suggestions for future projects. The most repeated request was to let them choose their own groups. When we discussed it in class, there was strong emotion expressed. On one side of the argument, students said that teacher-generated groups broke up cliques and allowed them to meet new people. On the other hand, those who wanted to choose their groups said it had nothing to do with cliques but with talent. For example, one student, a member of the drama club, said he would have created a better product if his group had more people who like to act. He said he had a lot of people in his group who feared public speaking, so the skit wasn't very good. Others nodded their heads in agreement and said the same things about art and musical ability. As teachers, we faced a conundrum because we strongly support heterogeneous groups for the reasons stated above, but if we did not take their opinion seriously or try to compromise, our attempts to create a more democratic classroom would be disingenuous. Our goal was to motivate students through empowerment, and according to Robert Peterson, "Empowerment does not mean 'giving' someone their freedom. Nor does it mean creating a type of surface 'empowerment' in which one gives the students the impression that they are 'equal' to the

teacher. The challenge for the teacher who believes in student empowerment is to create an environment which is both stimulating and flexible in which students can exercise increasing levels of power while regularly reflecting upon and evaluating the new learner-teacher relationship" (373–74). If nothing was done with the information the students provided, we would be promoting the myth of empowerment, not creating it within the students, therefore deflating any achieved motivation for future success. Before the next project, we will try something new as a compromise: Students will write down their talents or abilities and at least three project ideas. After collection, the teacher will look at the array of talents and ideas and match the groups according to interest and ability.

We also asked the students if creating a rubric collaboratively and allowing the class to grade the groups were good ideas. One student said that it put too much pressure on students to be judged by their peers. In response to that comment, which concerned us, another student came up with a philosophical answer. He said, "We are judged every day when we walk down the halls of this school. At least in this project we are judged on our work." Most students agreed that knowing they were going to be graded by the class motivated them to work harder because they wanted to give their classmates a reason to give them a high grade. Therefore, the class grading system created healthy competition that encouraged most students to perform at their highest level.

Conclusion

This project demonstrated that there are many ways to motivate students to perform at their highest level. When teachers combine multiple motivating strategies, not only do students produce quality work but they also learn to use power responsibly. Progressive methods ranging from team-teaching to the use of portfolios are still powerful methods attempting to encourage student-centered discourse, cross-curricular connections, and critical thinking. However, other ways of achieving these goals include simply allowing students to work with their peers, choose how they want to present their knowledge of a subject, and have a voice in their grade and the grades of their peers. By using these methods in the classroom, teachers can motivate their students to become active participants in their own education instead of bystanders waiting to be told what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "An Exploration of *The Crucible* through Seventeenth-Century Portraits," students incorporate analyses of characters from *The Crucible* into examinations of original 17th-century portraits of Puritans to create a visual portrait of the character. The project culminates in a "Portrait Gallery Walk" during which students present and defend their artwork. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploration-crucible-through-seventeenth-30513.html

John Day

Of Mice and Media

A high school teacher describes how he uses multimedia in conjunction with other activities to overcome low student motivation for reading traditional literature. Focused on* Of Mice and Men*, the pedagogy described is easily applied to other works.

Ryan hated my class. His defiant attitude, slumping shoulders, and careless work ethic conveyed only one sentiment: *I would rather be anywhere but here.* I wish I could claim that I pulled him aside one day and changed his life with an uplifting speech, but instead I just kept teaching, doing my best to inspire through innovative instruction and high expectations. I tried not to take Ryan's obvious disdain for my English class too personally.

During the spring semester, the clouds parted, the birds sang, and Ryan transformed into an energetic, diligent, and respectful student. He completed all of his assignments and seemed proud to have each one ready on his desk. He offered insightful commentary during class discussions and looked me in the eye as he spoke. I think he even smiled once or twice. I did not know for sure what had sparked such a dramatic turnaround, which he sustained for the rest of the year, but I was careful to nurture it with steady doses of praise.

Two years later, my wife and I went out to dinner with some friends, and I immediately recognized Ryan as our waiter. He greeted us sheepishly and explained how he was working his way through college. Later, as he delivered our entrées, he bent down beside me and revealed, "I just wanted to say thank you. Your class was cool with the videos and stuff. *Of Mice and Men* was the first book in my life where I actually read the whole thing."

Mystery solved. I already knew that John Steinbeck's novella was a class favorite. Ryan had not been the first (or the last) to confess his love for this simple yet compelling tale. But I left the restaurant that night with an important reminder of the powerful impact that literature can have on even the most cynical or struggling student. And perhaps even more importantly, from a pedagogical standpoint, I felt a strong sense of validation in my decision to teach *Of Mice and Men* using multimedia.

I introduce the book to my students using film clips and other advance organizers, but ultimately the students determine the direction of their own learning as we move through the text. With teamwork and critical thinking, my students produce short films, discussion questions, and analysis journals while reading in literature circles. As a culminating assessment project, they create music videos for the book to demonstrate their depth of understanding.

Building on Schema

I have been blessed with an administration that supports progressive ideas for classroom instruction; however, I realize that some school supervisors may automatically frown on the notion that music and movies may be used as effective teaching tools. For this reason, I like to have a strong foundation of research in my back pocket to support what I'm doing in the classroom—just in case I need it.

Implementing multimedia in the high school language arts curriculum has become necessary so that teachers may build connections between the background knowledge of students and the printed texts that are thrust upon them (Flood, Heath, and Lapp 20). This idea comes from an area of research in cognitive science known commonly as schema theory, which contends that every perception of

human experience, including reading, involves an interaction between the input we receive and what we already know (Anderson 248). Therefore, students should comprehend a text more easily if they are able to call on schema that relate to that material. As teachers we may sometimes forget that feeling of struggle and take for granted the natural ability to access schema during reading, while many students with less reading experience have not developed or even acquired this skill.

Since the turn of the new millennium, researchers have begun to make overt connections between schema theory and multimedia or popular culture. They recognize that students already possess a wealth of stored knowledge just waiting to be used as a vehicle to arrive at new learning. In the classroom, students frequently recall television, movies, music, and the Internet as their sources of knowledge about the world, and teachers have begun to employ these relevant texts in the classroom to draw on their interests and to meet their needs (Moje, Dillon, and O'Brien 177).

Common sense would also dictate that most people, teens in particular, enjoy movies, television, and music. Therefore, it stands to reason that infusing these media into the language arts curriculum would naturally motivate students to read, analyze, and discuss a wide range of literature, including the canon. This motivation for reading significantly contributes to overall reading achievement and school success (Guthrie et al. 232).

Before We Read

Although I have chosen to focus on *Of Mice and Men* because of its popularity with my students, the multimedia activities described in this article may be employed with equal success while studying other literary works. As a starting point for this classic, I elect to concentrate on marginalized populations because my students eventually discover through their reading that Steinbeck portrays all the major characters as outsiders in one way or another. Therefore, we begin with a five-minute freewriting exercise. The topic: What groups of people *within* our society do we view as outsiders or people who serve no meaningful purpose? How do we treat them? I usually break students into small groups to share their responses before discussing the topic as an entire class. This ensures that most students will feel comfortable enough to have a voice in the discussion.

We talk about the marginalized populations in our society today and the wide range of treatment they receive from its members. A typical class discussion will include comments about the homeless, the handicapped, criminals, and even children; however, my students surprise me every year with interesting responses from *their* world such as geeks and goths. I explain that the major characters in the novella are treated like outsiders just like those discussed in their freewrites.

To further illustrate this concept, I show several film clips that offer interesting depictions of such people and their various struggles (see fig. 1). I use software to save specific clips on my computer and show them with Windows Media Player and a projector, but it's just as easy to play the DVD and skip ahead to the relevant scenes.

Since the turn of the new millennium, researchers have begun to make overt connections between schema theory and multimedia or popular culture. They recognize that students already possess a wealth of stored knowledge just waiting to be used as a vehicle to arrive at new learning.

I have also used film clips from *Rain Man, Pride, Cocoon,* and *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy,* respectively, to connect with the characters from *Of Mice and Men* listed in Figure 1. Although some of these movies carry an R rating, I exercise extreme care in choosing scenes with content that is appropriate for school.

After the discussion of these film clips, my next goal is to activate the students' relevant background knowledge of the story's setting. I divide the class into small groups and give each group a piece of butcher paper with a T-chart on it. The groups have ten minutes to write on the left side of the T-chart everything they know about life during the Great Depression. Next, as each group presents its information to the class, peers fill in the right side of the T-chart with new information they have just learned. I facilitate the presentations by clarifying facts, monitoring repetitive statements, and occasionally paraphrasing information.

FIGURE 1. Films with Marginalized Groups

Character	Movie	Scene(s)	Discussion
Lennie	*I Am Sam*	Sean Penn, as a mentally challenged single parent, embarrasses his daughter while trying to order food in a restaurant.	Should the father be allowed to raise his daughter alone? What responsibility does society have to protect her interests?
Crooks	*Men of Honor*	Attempting to become the first African American naval deep-sea diver, Cuba Gooding Jr. waits outside the base all day before his superior officer grants him entry. All other recruits vacate the barracks on his arrival.	Why is he receiving such treatment? What do you think of his reaction? What should he do next? Why does one recruit remain in the barracks when all others leave?
Old Candy	*Ocean's Eleven*	Played by Carl Reiner, an elderly member of a sophisticated criminal crew shows signs of fatigue or illness. George Clooney questions his ability to get the job done.	Should the old man be taken off the job? How does he feel about the position he is in? Is there an age at which people become too old to work effectively? How should we as a society take care of the elderly? Who is responsible?
Curley's wife	*GI Jane*	Demi Moore is the first woman to join the training program for Navy SEALS. Fellow recruits shun and complain about her; superior officers resent her presence.	Does she belong in the Navy SEALS program? Should women be allowed in combat situations? How do you think she feels? How should she handle the situation?

Finally, I show portions of a short documentary entitled *Hard Times for an American Girl: The Great Depression,* which offers an endearing depiction of young children interviewing people who lived through the Depression era. Another option is an educational video called *America's Economy: Sorrow and Hope,* which contains a segment with relevant information about John Steinbeck's life and the plight of migrant workers in California during this difficult period. I ask the groups to continue adding new material to the right side of the T-chart during the video, and then we vote on which chart to display in the classroom (which has limited wall space). With so many connections to the text already established, my students are ready to read.

Our discussion pertaining to marginalized populations pays off at this point because students use those insights about the characters as a foundation to discover and examine other elements of the text such as conflict, symbolism, foreshadowing, and theme.

While We Read

I divide the class into six groups of literature circles: the reading can either be completed at home, in the literature circle groups, or as a whole class with an audio recording. I have had the greatest amount of success with the latter, but group reading also works well if I model expectations and designate a leader.

As we discuss the effects of each character's separation from society, the students also begin to interpret a variety of literary devices that Steinbeck employs. They keep a literary analysis journal as their groups move through each chapter (see fig. 2). The journal requires students to identify specific literary devices, quote the text, and describe the significance of each device. Our discussion pertaining to marginalized populations pays off at this point because students use those insights about the characters as a foundation to discover and examine other elements of the text such as conflict, symbolism, foreshadowing, and theme. While reading, I encourage students to pause frequently and clarify any potential confusion or make note of literary elements.

At the conclusion of each chapter, my students also prepare one open-ended discussion question, which they must first answer themselves before trading questions with a group member. I model for my students the types of questions that elicit higher-level thinking as opposed to surface-level plot questions that students tend to write. Common question stems include "What would you

FIGURE 2. Sample from Student Literary Analysis Journal

Text	Literary Element	Significance/Effect
Chp. 1 Pg. 9	Simile: "Slowly, like a terrier who doesn't want to bring a ball to its master, Lennie approached . . ."	The overall submissiveness of Lennie shows how much he respects George and will listen to almost anything he says. Also, the comparison to a terrier allows us later to more easily relate Lennie to Candy's dog.
Chp. 2 Pg. 33	Hyperbole: "capable of killing a fly . . . with a bull whip without touching the mule."	This over exaggeration of Slim shows how revered he really is in the community. It helps us further understand why he is so respected and they all see him as the leader.
Chp. 3 Pg. 40	Symbolism: "George stacked the scattered cards and began to lay out his solitaire hand."	George's constant use of cards for solitaire seems to represent how he really feels about himself, alone. The game is played alone, even with others around, just as George is really alone no matter how many people are nearby. With Lennie he carries a burden most people could not imagine.
Chp. 4 Pg. 80	Foreshadowing: "I'll talk to you later. I like machines."	Curley's wife makes this remark, allowing us to think that maybe there will be a conflict later. She seems to flirt with Lennie in a way that George warned him about. Does she actually like Lennie, or is she just lonely?
Chp. 5 Pg. 93	Personification: "Then gradually time awakened again and moved sluggishly on."	After Curley's wife dies, she seems more beautiful, as if time itself has stopped. This allows the magnitude of how she has changed to really sink into the reader. Our understanding expands as we see how miserable she really was while alive.
Chp. 6 Pg. 103	Imagery: "Only the topmost ridges were in the sun now. The shadow in the valley was blue and soft."	This is important because even though all has gone so wrong and George is about to kill Lennie, the valley shadows are still serene, a total contrast to the hectic scene caused by Lennie. In the end they may symbolize how Lennie will finally be at peace.

do if . . . ?" and "Why do you think . . . ?" This activity gives students some ownership in their learning, promotes the use of textual evidence to support their ideas and opinions, and exposes them to other perspectives. I always have a discussion question on the board for those students who come to class without one.

Finally, I assign each literature circle group one chapter for a filming activity based on their knowledge of cinematic effects that I covered earlier in the year. John Golden's *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom* is an excellent resource for teaching this information in a relatively quick unit. As each group completes its assigned chapter, instead of working on journals or discussion questions, the designated group chooses a *very brief* yet significant scene from the chapter to capture on film. For example, the group assigned to Chapter 3 might choose a portion of the scene when Old Candy's dog is shot, when plans for the dream ranch take shape, or when Curley picks a fight with Lennie.

Before filming the scene, the group has to make some important choices for cinematic effect, such as the type of camera shot, angle, and movement. The group also needs to consider various options for lighting and sound. Once filming is complete, the group determines how it wants to edit the shots together, using methods such as crosscutting, dissolving, or the eye-line match. Without realizing it, students have begun making decisions regarding characterization, tone, style, imagery, and conflict.

Along with shooting the video, the group must submit a brief report that describes its intended effects based on the cinematic choices it made, similar to a storyboard without the artwork (Golden 56–57).

Along with shooting the video, the group must submit a brief report that describes its intended effects based on the cinematic choices it made, similar to a storyboard without the artwork (Golden 56–57). For example, the group might include in the report that the fight scene involved the following cinematic choices: (a) a close-up of Lennie's hand swallowing Curley's fist (b) with crunching sound effects and (c) a cut to a medium shot of

Lennie's entire body (d) from a low angle. The intended effect is to establish Lennie's overwhelming physical dominance during the conflict.

Once the group has shown its video, the rest of the class is required to write a short critique that identifies at least two cinematic choices the group made and explains their effectiveness. I set aside time for sharing some of the critiques and also allow the group to read its report for further clarification. Students tell me that filming the videos is their favorite part of literature circles, but it also takes more time. For other groups that finish their activities before the filming group, I offer extra credit for storyboarding other important scenes in the chapter (Golden 56–57).

Every year I am struck by the innovative methods that students use to craft their music videos, such as original animation and song writing, or even the use of music without lyrics.

It is so rewarding to observe the pride students take in their videos and the ownership they have in their learning. I personally enjoy each group's reaction when I show the students the way the director, Gary Sinise, decided to shoot the same scene in the film version of this book. Golden suggests "show[ing] students a filmed version of the story they have read so that they can see the similarities and differences between their interpretations and those of professional filmmakers" (57–58).

By the time we reach the end, each group has completed the filming activity, literary analysis journals, and discussion questions, and the students have participated in a thorough exploration of the text.

After We Read

Of Mice and Men offers a great opportunity to demonstrate parody. After a brief discussion of the concept, I show a clip from the movie *Tommy Boy.* The scene involves Chris Farley explaining to a waitress why he is a terrible salesman, and in the process he mutilates a dinner roll in the same manner that Lennie inadvertently kills mice, pretending that the dinner roll is a naughty pet. I point out to my students that although the scene is funny in its own right, they would not have understood the parody of Lennie had they not read *Of Mice and Men.*

I also show a clip from a *Bugs Bunny* cartoon entitled "The Abominable Snow Rabbit." My students laugh with amazed recognition of the Abominable Snowman who talks like Lennie and loves to hug, pet, and squeeze the little characters he encounters, calling them all "George." Some students even admit their familiarity with this cartoon, never having realized that it was a parody of Lennie. Ultimately they begin to respect what it feels like to be well-read enough to be in on the joke.

The same holds true when I show students a *Saturday Night Live* sketch hosted by James Franco that offers a hilarious alternate ending to *Of Mice and Men,* one in which Lennie is not so slow-witted after all.

Our study of this novella culminates with a music video project. I recognize that students possess a widespread knowledge of popular culture, creative talent, and technological savvy, a knowledge that is not accurately measured by traditional assessments. So, rather than giving an exam or essay, I assign the music video project, which provides students with the chance to demonstrate what they have learned in a way that is familiar, fun, and engaging.

I instruct my students to create a music video that correlates in some way with the plot and characters from *Of Mice and Men.* I leave the format of the video entirely up to them but insist that it combine three different songs not longer than 30 seconds each. They may choose to shoot the entire video in live action with a video camera or use a variety of programs that will integrate or capture other outside clips and images. Students must also share aloud a typed explanation of the specific creative process they went through in developing the video. In their explanations, they might include why they chose a particular song, how certain lines of the song relate to the text, and how different aspects of the video support their literary interpretations of the book. Every year I am struck by the innovative methods that students use to craft their music videos, such as original animation and song writing, or even the use of music without lyrics. In addition, the project has given students from other cultures the chance to share their music and make it part of the learning process.

Beyond the Classroom

I still keep in touch with Ryan, who currently works in the oil and gas industry. He handed me his business card the last time we met, explaining with an air of confidence how his company is paying for his college tuition. I can't help but chuckle a little when I see him now, remembering that petulant teenager who wanted nothing to do with English class. And I'd like to think that in some small way his experiences in my classroom have contributed to his success. Perhaps John Steinbeck and I make a pretty good team.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Literature Circle Roles Reframed: Reading as a Film Crew" substitutes film production roles for the traditional literature circle roles. After reviewing these roles—such as director, casting director, and set designer—students work together in cooperative groups to read and discuss a piece of literature, each assuming a film production role. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/literature-circle-roles-reframed-877.html

Jessica Matthews Meth

Inspiring Curiosity and Enthusiasm for Nonfiction: A Project Designed to Boost Students' Will to Read

The author describes a nine-week unit incorporating strategy instruction, guest speakers, and multimedia to engage struggling readers.

In my role as supervisor to middle school and high school student teachers, I have observed dozens of students who avoid reading (or at least required school reading) at every turn. I have also known frustrated teachers, daunted by the challenge of getting student readers up to speed. In one teacher's words, referring to a resistant middle school student reading on a third-grade level, "Do I know what to do with a kid like him? I mean, how in the world?" We cannot surrender, however, to what Patrick F. Finn calls "domesticating," or soft education, instead of helping students to develop critical reading and thinking skills (xvi). To better encourage a desire in students to read, I set out to experiment with themes, texts, and activities to learn more about which practices spark students' curiosity and enthusiasm for reading, the drive to engage texts. Without developing a will to read, how will students develop—or sharpen—skill in reading?

Motivation is not about curricular frills; energizing students, keeping them engrossed in meaningful tasks, is essential. The literature shows that engaged readers outperform less-motivated peers on comprehension tests (Guthrie and Wigfield). At the heart of engaged reading, however, we usually find competence, a catch-22 for striving older readers. If students feel confident about their reading ability—in research jargon, if they have high *self-efficacy* (Bandura)—they are more likely to engage text. No surprise there: We willingly take part in activities we believe we can succeed at. That means the good readers keep reading, keep exposing themselves to print, and keep improving (Cunningham and Stanovich). But strugglers don't read much, if at all, and fall further and further behind competent peers, a phenomenon known as the Matthew Effect (Stanovich). How are teachers to get struggling students excited about reading if skill is a major drive for reading will?

There is no way around skill development, even if it incites yawns, but teachers can meet adolescent needs that can help win the motivation game. We know students want to feel an increasing sense of competence and control in the classroom (Ryan and Deci), to feel actively involved in the learning process, and to have a choice in what they read and write (Ivey and Broaddus). They need to feel meaningfully connected to others (Deci et al.)—a need often met by the great social conductor, technology. When students interact in positive ways with others, they enjoy a greater sense of belonging—another basic human need. They also crave relevant tasks that allow them to pursue genuine interests in a challenging (though not too taxing) environment (Miller) that grants them dignity and respect as human beings. A watered-down curriculum, after all, does not send a message of faith in students' abilities.

A Homegrown Effort to Boost Reading Motivation and Engagement

There is always an easy solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong.

—*Henry L. Mencken, "The Divine Afflatus"*

This nine-week unit is complex, even messy, a combination of professional instincts, experience, and

knowledge of evidence-based practices. Ms. Adams, classroom teacher, Mrs. Hathaway, special education resource teacher, and I co-taught lessons to one seventh-grade class of students, reading, on average, one year below grade level. After agreeing on preliminary plans, we dove in, tweaking lessons on a daily basis as we negotiated our way toward our goal—improved reading motivation.

Given the importance of competence in the motivation equation, I could not ignore reading skill while designing a unit to rev up students about reading. Combined strategy instruction was thus woven into the plans, involving teacher modeling of, followed by guided small-group practice with, predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing text (modeled after Palincsar and Brown's "Reciprocal Teaching"). To help students build relevant background knowledge for unit readings, or mental Velcro to stick new knowledge to, I gathered a sequence of short, nonfiction texts (Smith and Wilhelm), rooted in unit concepts, including *(in)justice, survival, sacrifice, consequence, empathy, exploitation,* and *responsibility,* for use during whole-class strategy instruction.

We used strategy instruction to target comprehension skills and promote self-regulated reading (Reed et al.), and I designed a WebQuest to boost engagement and challenge students to explore, via diverse online nonfiction texts, themes of universal appeal to adolescents. The WebQuest challenged students to grapple with "The Use and Abuse of Power" by considering questions such as, "How and why do humans abuse their power to bully, threaten, or exploit others? What does it mean to be a responsible citizen? What can individuals, groups, or even countries do to protect the survival (and well-being) of humans and animals?" Students chose a research topic—either a population of at-risk children or an endangered animal—and set out to collect relevant facts, determine roots of exploitation or endangerment, and uncover ways humans might fight suffering and injustice in our world.

Though the WebQuest required students to digest online articles, blogs, photos, and video clips, offered reading and assignment choices, and encouraged peer collaboration, I worried student interest (and effort) might wane when all this reading became *hard.* I thus jumpstarted the unit by encouraging students to discover, through interactions with community members, reasons to value reading. If students believe reading *really matters,* they may work harder at developing strong(er) literacy skills.

I invited community members into the classroom to participate in three student-led group interviews. Our guests included a veterinarian, a collegiate basketball player, a collegiate soccer goalie, a movie producer, an editor, a businessman, a manager of rock bands, and a firefighter. The students' task was to generate as many answers as possible to a simple question: "Why read?"

Following this foundational activity, the students tackled a preliminary WebQuest task designed to familiarize them with online research and to engage the students' interest. Students chose five of 25 bizarre, animal-related statements from the WebQuest (such as "horned lizards can squirt blood from their eyes" or "some hummingbirds weigh less than a penny") and set off to confirm, or invalidate (and correct), the strange claims. To prevent inefficient Web surfing, students searched within a Portaportal site (http://www.portaportal.com), a bookmarking site that I used to create a list of relevant, appropriate links for students to use for their research. (See Figures 1 and 2 for examples.)

Though the WebQuest required students to digest online articles, blogs, photos, and video clips, offered reading and assignment choices, and encouraged peer collaboration, I worried student interest (and effort) might wane when all this reading became *hard*.

As exciting as blood-squirting lizards can be, we soon pushed students beyond facts to deeper

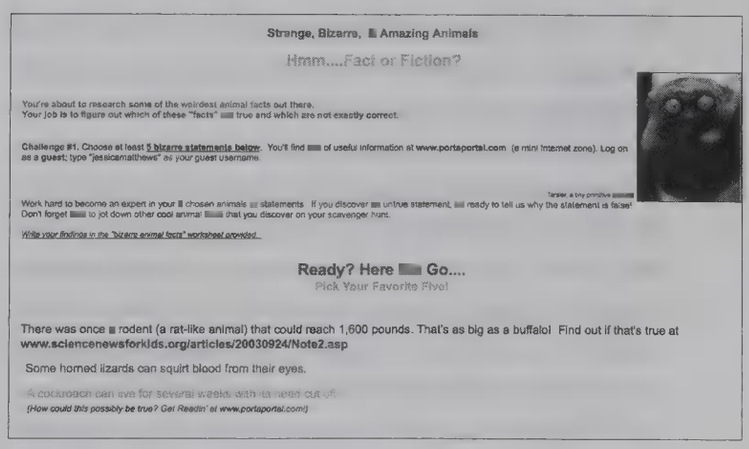

FIGURE 1. Bizarre trivia piqued students' curiosity and prompted purposeful reading.

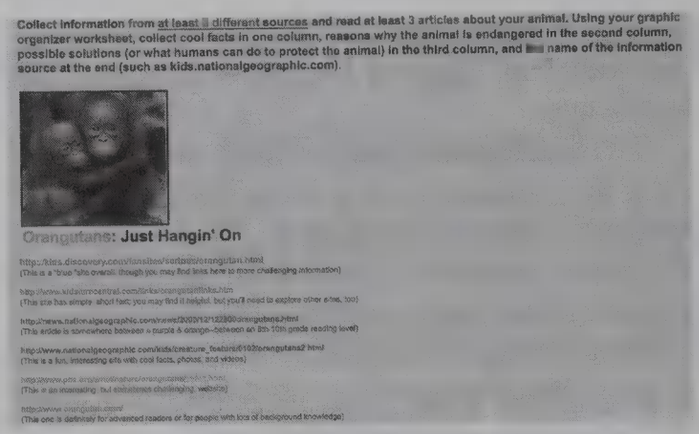

FIGURE 2. The WebQuest allowed students to explore various pathways to knowledge.

conceptual understandings of the unit's big ideas. During each day's brief strategy lesson, we discussed questions of survival and justice, for example, as they pertained to the day's article. During the third week of the unit, students selected a topic they wished to pursue, alone or in pairs, in greater depth via the WebQuest. Some investigated the source of suffering among child soldiers in Uganda, as well as what other humans can do to protect them from a life of brutality and exploitation; other students wanted to find out how and why tigers are threatened, as well as what humans can or should do about their plight.

The prospect of interviewing a collegiate soccer player made Carlos, a quiet Hispanic student, bolt upright in his seat and exclaim, "Yes!" Elizabeth, a tall, confident student, called out, "Ooh! I want to be an actress!" when we shared that a movie producer would visit us.

What Worked, for Whom, and under What Conditions?

We found that combining several instructional practices worked best to motivate the students to read, and I survey these combinations below. However, we also negotiated the delicate balance between instructional combinations and ever-shifting contextual variables (i.e., students' attitudes, interests, skills, and knowledge). For example, the combination of collaborative assignments and students with Asperger's syndrome, a condition often characterized by reclusive behavior, yielded oil-and-water effects, whereas the same challenge among students who craved social interaction worked well. Therefore the following combinations of practices require flexible, reflective teachers, willing to adapt ideas to meet the needs and interests of particular students.

Combination 1: A Share in Classroom Control; Real-World, Hands-On Tasks; and Real-World Reasons to Read

We struck gold—serendipitous, infectious excitement—while *preparing* for our interview guests. In the classroom teacher's words, they were *pumped.* The prospect of interviewing a collegiate soccer player made Carlos, a quiet Hispanic student, bolt upright in his seat and exclaim, "Yes!" Elizabeth, a tall, confident student, called out, "Ooh! I want to be an actress!" when we shared that a movie producer would visit us. They all agreed it would be a good idea to practice interviewing skills before guests arrived. Since I was a classroom guest of sorts, as a teacher researcher, I suggested they interview me. To prepare, students spent approximately 15 minutes in small groups drafting questions. Framing the interview in a game format, we pitted girls against boys, with points earned for questions that elicited a 45-second response time, our attempt to prompt thinking around closed- versus open-ended questions. We invited several volunteers to take on leadership roles in the game: a note-taker to document all questions asked and their response times; a timekeeper; and host(s) to introduce me. We had far more volunteers than jobs.

When the interview began, students fired questions in machine-gun succession, hardly pausing to listen to answers or to generate response-based follow-up questions, so we paused the interview to model appropriate behaviors, highlighting active listening and reflecting critically on question quality. Many students relished the competitive edge to the game format, evidenced as smiles and pumped fists whenever a point was earned for asking an effective open-ended question. We also sensed that the interview process felt novel, interesting, and authentic to students—"real world." In one student's words, "It was kind of more interesting and complex and different from the usual stuff."

Students' curiosity and enthusiasm remained steady during the community-based group interviews. Pervasive engagement seemed rooted, at

least in part, in a democratic learning environment. Students in this class were used to sitting quietly in their desks, facing the front, listening to the teacher. The interview process put them at the center of meaning making. Initially, we invited students to introduce each of our guests, but again, we could not meet the demand for such jobs, so we found ourselves inventing opportunities on the spot, such as the "interview manager" who welcomed guests, called on students to ask questions, and kept track of time. Teachers observed from the sidelines.

When granted a little share in classroom power, students took their tasks seriously. I did not pester volunteers to gather information for their introductions. They sought me out. After granting Carlos's wish to introduce the athletes, he initiated contact with me twice over two days, first to request biographical information so he could prepare his brief introductions, and then to verify that I had not forgotten his role. When students like Carlos embraced the challenge, others followed, triggering a chain reaction of positive peer pressure. The following day, William, a basketball player, approached me before class to ask if he, too, could introduce a particular day's guests. In the end, the boys agreed to share the responsibility. The same day, Johnnie, whose modus operandi was to read vampire novels surreptitiously in class, if he was not staring blankly out the window, got wind of his peers' leadership roles and asked me, with furrowed brow, if he, too, could introduce somebody. During a post-unit interview, Ms. Adams said, "I think that getting them to do jobs made them feel really important." I agreed; they loved feeling in control of things.

The primary purpose, however, of these group interviews was to develop positive values, goals, and beliefs around reading (Guthrie and Wigfield)—to help students internalize the importance of strong reading skills. They did gather many answers to the question, "Why read?" though they were more interested in asking their own questions. In written reflections at the end of the interview week, prompted by a statistic—every school day, nearly 7,000 students drop out of high school ("About the Crisis")—students shared pragmatic reasons to read, even if several admitted they did not find reading enjoyable.

In an especially inspiring example, Matthew, who struggles with spelling as a result of dyslexia, composed sophisticated thoughts despite his linguistic challenges:

> Please! If you want to have a great life and work and make money. If you think reading and writeing is stodid [stupid] there are some reasons why you tropouts should go to school. Do you wont to now how people that cam not read or write have been scamed and heart [hurt] and when you sign up for a morgeage to be unsure weather you can trost any one? Becose if you don't get back in to high school and get back to reading you are going to have nothing for the rest of your life.

Following these interviews, we started on the WebQuest, continuing on our mission to uncover factors that boost students' reading motivation. Often we stumbled on insights, despite our efforts to "engineer" success. For example, though I suspected that carefully sequenced, short nonfiction texts would make a difference to striving readers, teacher-student rapport emerged as a more powerful force in engaging students to tackle substantive reading. It is impossible, however, to isolate a single variable—*the* golden thread in the web—of a successful activity. The following combination teases out the forces that contributed to sustained engagement with research projects.

Though I suspected that carefully sequenced, short nonfiction texts would make a difference to striving readers, teacher-student rapport emerged as a more powerful force in engaging students to tackle substantive reading.

Combination 2: Positive Relationships, Challenging Tasks, Opportunities to Interact, Choices, and a Chance to Make a Difference

"We seriously don't want you to go, Ms. Matthews. I mean seriously. Why do you have to go?" Students' handmade cards affirmed a root of our bond: a common awareness of, and concern for, social justice around the world. Lauren's parting message read, "I can't believe you're leaving I am going to miss you soooo very much! I never thought about other kids in different countries as much as I do now. Thanks, you already made the world a better place." Elizabeth wrote, "Here is some of our love to you. You were such a help to us. Keep on trying to get every-

one to understand the world is not a great place to some. We all can make a difference, and you make the world a better place. Never give up."

Several student pairs chose to research at-risk children in various parts of the world, including orphans, victims of war and poverty, child laborers, child soldiers, and even child victims of commercial sexual exploitation. As students browsed topics and websites on the first day of independent WebQuest work, I approached Elizabeth and Christie—a pair of popular girls usually focused on combing and retying their hair or slipping in illicit boy-talk during class—and I suggested they research a disturbing topic: the commercial sexual exploitation of girls. Assuring them it was their choice, I warned them the reading materials required maturity.

For the next five weeks, Elizabeth and Christie revealed numerous abilities: to empathize with young women around the world whom they had never met; to sustain engagement with their self-chosen issue and diverse texts; to collaborate with one another effectively; to acquire new vocabulary; and to record a public service announcement with the goal of raising awareness for exploited girls around the world. Perhaps flattered, and a little surprised, that teachers permitted them to research such a delicate, challenging subject, these girls tackled their task in earnest, as reflected in the following field note I took during their class:

> Yesterday Elizabeth and Christie worked with Ms. Hathaway's small group, and she pointed out that the girls were emotionally invested in their subject and that at one point, Elizabeth said to Victor, who was showing no concern for the suffering children, "Look, stop it, Victor! This is serious!"

Our shared empathy for exploited victims around the world strengthened the bonds we shared, which contributed to students' good feelings about being in the class. This work also fostered students' sense that they could *do something*: they could raise awareness of these issues, whether in the form of a public service announcement (recorded as a podcast), a children's picture book, a PowerPoint presentation, or a short video. This student empowerment further boosted the students' task engagement. Lauren, a shy student who collaborated with Fernanda, an English language learner, to create a simple video to raise awareness for child laborers, said, "You can do a project that can make a difference to people, and I really enjoy it." These are not the voices of passive students dutifully completing worksheets, but, rather, voices of students who feel engaged by real-world challenges.

Positive relationships also helped sustain students' focus on required but not necessarily "fun" activities. In addition to participating in WebQuest sessions, during which students and teachers, sitting in small groups, often discussed outrage and sadness over alarming statistics, the class practiced comprehension strategies, a less-popular activity. While classroom teachers and I rarely achieved 100% engagement during strategy instruction, field notes capture several instances in which students hushed nearby peers when we asked the class to refocus. It is possible they simply valued strategy lessons as helpful, but I sensed their regular eye contact with us, as well as their willingness to facilitate cooperative behavior among peers, were likely an act of solidarity in the face of the social atrocities we were trying to combat.

When it came to taking the reading comprehension test at the end of the unit, even after various students groaned, participants such as Elizabeth, Lauren, and Christie nevertheless smiled when I confessed that I, too, had always disliked such tests in school, and they nodded when I asked them to do their best to "beat" their test. Their willingness to put forth effort could be at least partially explained by the bonds to which their body language attested.

Combination 3: Regular Practice with Comprehension Strategies, Peer Interaction, and Leadership Roles

It took time to nudge students from passive to active reading behaviors. Recalling early strategy lessons, Ms. Adams said, "At first I would be like *oh my gosh, where are they getting this as the main idea?* They would totally miss the boat sometimes, but as time went on, their comprehension really improved." It was true; we had a rough start. Students often did not *think*; they rushed to the end of a text and declared they were "done."

Regular practice, however, reaped rewards. At the close of the unit, Ms. Adams agreed they had come a long way: "I think they're definitely think-

ing more while they read. Before, they just went through something and [did] not really care a lot of times; . . . whereas now I think they're asking each other some good questions and they're stopping [to use strategies] because they've seen us do it so much that it's become a part of how they're reading."

As students' self-confidence with strategy use developed, so did their willingness not only to participate during whole- and small-group strategy practice but also to justify responses to teachers and peers. No longer were they willing to accept "any old answer" from peers. Ms. Adams noted, "It was good when people like Matthew and Elizabeth started noticing, '*That's not really relevant information; that's not anything really to do with the main point.*'" We overheard students challenging illogical predictions, helping one another with vocabulary, and asking thought-provoking questions. Take Anton, for example, a quiet boy who usually preferred to work alone, asking peers for clarification of unknown vocabulary while leading his group through strategic reading:

> "What does regression mean?" Anton asked his group, after reading a polar bear article aloud. Harold responded, reading a definition included as a footnote. Anton continued reading aloud, pausing to make a prediction: "It looks as though they will become extinct." Harold then asked, "Do you think it's too late to save the bears?"

Most students enjoyed the chance to lead small-group strategy practice and took their roles seriously. For example, on hearing he would be in charge of his group, Shelton called out, "Yeah! Yeah man! I'm the discussion leader." While reading a chapter aloud on Alaskan sled dogs, he paused to probe peers' thinking, saying, "What do you think will happen next?" or "Do you have any questions?"

Literacy acquisition is a long-term, developmental process; there are no quick-fix solutions, but we found strategy practice useful in developing seeds of self-confidence in students' reading skill, seeds that, with enough fertile soil, in the form of stimulating, engaging environments, might germinate, slowly but surely, into sustained reading motivation. The interview and WebQuest activities tapped students' curiosity and put them at the center of open-ended inquiry processes that provided choice of research tasks and readings while challenging them to grapple with real-world problems and issues. Interpersonal bonds around questions of social justice promoted engagement with unit texts. Technology facilitated these connections, allowing students to access online texts from around the globe and to create digital products of their own, but students' hearts and our encouragement, often in the form of small-group mentorship, made the connections real and enduring.

We overheard students challenging illogical predictions, helping one another with vocabulary, and asking thought-provoking questions.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Helping a Teen Plan and Conduct an Interview" offers advice on how to prepare students to conduct an interview to create a more positive, productive experience for everyone involved. The site includes a video that can be shared with the students. http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/tips-howtos/helping-teen-plan-conduct-30113.html

How Do I Know My Students Are Learning?

I know like Michelangelo knew each time he struck the chisel.
I know like a mother knows when to scold or comfort.
I know like a tree knows when to turn its leaves to the sun.

I know with purpose and study and insight and wisdom.
I know by paying attention, by listening, by caring.
I know it in their victorious dances and in their defeated shuffles.
I know it when they read and when they write and when they talk.

I know each of them—individually—
Only vaguely by comparison,
For each is on a private journey.
Each will use uniquely what she gains here.

I will nourish and guide them—one by one.
And I will know.
But more, they will know.
And the test is their futures
And the evaluators themselves.

—Dana Keller

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Dana Keller teaches American Literature and AP Literature and Composition at Hudson High School in Hudson, Ohio. As a boy, he wrote stories, composed plays, and played teacher. Then, for a couple of decades, life hit. Today he recaptures his childhood by teaching, contributing to curriculum journals and textbooks, and writing short stories and poems. He lives in Hudson, Ohio, with his wife and two children. Email him at kellerd@hudson.edu.

Anne E. Richardson

Exploring Text through Student Discussions: Accountable Talk in the Middle School Classroom

A middle school teacher describes many strategies for engaging adolescents in productive discussions about literary texts.

It's a common dilemma in many classrooms: Give your students an inch and they often take a mile. As teachers, we've probably all been in the situation where we want to encourage student participation and find a way to engage students in a particular text or topic, yet we err on the side of caution to keep the imagined mayhem at bay. Classroom chemistry, school climate, and individual teacher-student relationships all play a role in how far we as teachers can push the limits and take chances in our classrooms. Because I tend to be directive, I speak from firsthand experience about my fears of "letting go" with my fifth graders. I was afraid that they would not be willing to assume the responsibility that goes along with independent work and worried that socializing would take precedence over productive, on-topic conversations between students. What I have been thrilled to find this year is that giving my students the stage and allowing them to explore text through small student-led group discussions has empowered them, engaged them, encouraged them, and, in the process, inspired us all.

Talking about Reading

My middle school was looking for a way to improve students' reading scores. Like many districts, we had quite a few services already in place related to the teaching of reading: a variety of benchmark reading assessments, in-class and pull-out reading supports, ongoing professional development, and many skilled educators. Yet it seemed that most of the practice of reading strategies was limited to the language arts classrooms. After much discussion at the administrative level, our faculty voted to bring in outside help. In 2008, consultants for the Center of Applied Child Development at Tufts University helped us to build our understanding of how to teach reading strategies more effectively across the content areas. Several teachers and I volunteered to join in this effort as lab classroom teachers, with the understanding that our rooms and our instructional practices might be observed by other staff members from our school and potentially throughout our district. After some preliminary training and modeling from Tufts consultants and with the frequent support of our school's reading specialist and an in-house implementation coordinator, I got started.

I began by teaching six key reading strategies to my students, modeling these strategies one by one, and then allowing the students time to practice using these strategies, on paper and out loud. I sought to familiarize the students with these strategies in preparation for their participation at the Accountable Talk table.

The following six key reading strategies and my interpretations of them are based on a discussion in Cris Tovani's *Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?*:

1. *Schema*—the background knowledge you bring with you when you read
2. *Visualization*—making pictures in your mind about what you are reading
3. *Connections*—linking a text to another text, one's self or the world

4. *Questioning*—asking questions as you read
5. *Inferring*—forming educated conclusions based on the author's words
6. *Determining Importance*—highlighting key points related to a purpose

You may notice that I did not include another of Tovani's strategies called *Synthesizing,* which I define as the act of combining information that the students already know with facts from a text and then restating those facts in their own words. Early in the process, I didn't feel that my students were ready for this sophisticated, higher-order thinking skill. I would find out later on in the year that they were ready and willing to give it a try!

Thinking Aloud

Introducing the six key reading strategies can be done most effectively by modeling them overtly and repeatedly. As the reading expert in the classroom, it is my responsibility to show my students how I use the strategies as I read. I make it quite clear that experienced readers perform these strategies automatically. When I read a novel for pleasure or a newspaper for information, I don't speak aloud my connections or questions. I might think about them, but I don't allow them to interrupt the flow of my reading. However, students must practice the strategies aloud until they become second nature. We accomplish this through a type of modeling and practice called Thinking Aloud (Wilhelm 18–19). I read aloud a passage or chapter and stop, frequently, to ask myself questions, "I wonder what the author means when he says . . . ?" or share schema, "I have schema about Washington DC because I traveled there with my family . . ." or make connections such as, "the way the main character loves to cook connects me to a movie I saw about working in a restaurant kitchen . . . ." It's as if I reveal a running dialogue inside my mind that I let the students hear and share. After a while, it's their turn to try it out, first in a structured classroom discussion format and later in small groups or partnerships. I have found that my students are eager to undertake these strategies. They quickly lose their reticence and become energized by the give and take of their think-aloud revelations.

Preparing for Accountable Talk

It was important for me to involve the students from the beginning as we prepared for Accountable Talk. First, we shared ideas about "What Is Reading?" While the children eagerly raised their hands to offer opinions such as, "Reading is feeling like I'm inside the story," "reading is time to be peaceful and relax," or "reading is a way to see what a writer is thinking," I recorded their thoughts on an anchor chart and tacked it on the wall of my classroom. The anchor chart is a piece of chart paper, perhaps decorated and illustrated with colored markers, clearly written, containing concepts from a lesson that we want to save. Posting the anchor chart assured my students that I took their ideas seriously and would keep them visible for future reference (see fig. 1).

The next day, we brainstormed about what an effective group discussion would look like. I assumed that many students would not have any schema on cooperative and collaborative discussions, much less literature talks. After all, I reasoned, my fifth graders are ten and eleven years of age, not exactly experts in collaborative group work. Was I wrong!

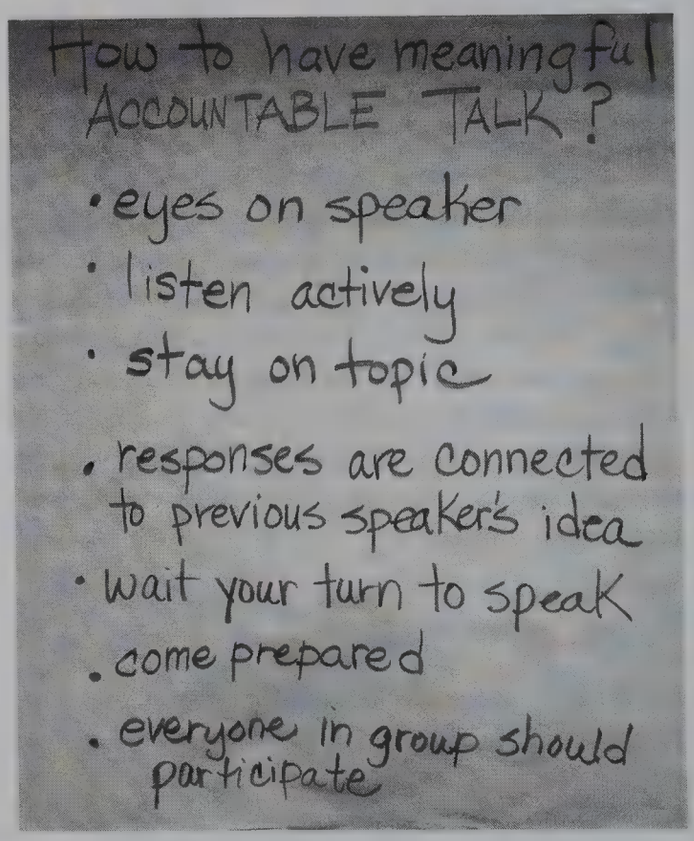

FIGURE 1. Student-Inspired Anchor Chart of Accountable Talk Expectations

Referring to the First 20 Days of Independent Reading minilesson on Buzzing Effectively (Fountas and Pinnell 142), I launched into the purpose for our lesson. "Today we are going to brainstorm ideas about what Accountable Talk will be like. What kinds of rules do we need to set up before we start practicing our talk?" To my astonishment, the students needed little encouragement to produce a wise and workable anchor chart of six basic "rules of conduct" in Accountable Talk:

1. One person speaks at a time.
2. Use a one-foot voice (a voice that can be heard only from a foot away or less).
3. Stay on topic.
4. Listen actively to each other.
5. Keep eyes on the speaker.
6. Make connections to the previous speaker's ideas before moving on to another idea.

I found that two of these rules warranted further discussion. First, active listening, the fourth rule, was an abstract concept for some students. My concrete thinkers needed me to model active listening and to describe a variety of scenarios before they were able to make this one their own. After all, the word *active* implies movement, yet the meaning behind active listening is to be still and give your discussion partner your full attention, without jumping in or interrupting. Once we acknowledged the irony of that term, the students had an easier time comprehending it. Second, the sixth rule, discussing the speaker's ideas before moving to the next person, is another way of saying piggybacking. Piggybacking means jumping onto the tail end of your partner's comment and adding to it before moving on to the next point. When piggybacking, we use explicit language such as, "I have something that piggybacks onto what Bobby said," or "To piggyback onto Jean's comment . . . ." This was another concept that modeling helped to clarify and solidify in the students' minds.

Setting a Purpose

It's one thing to ask students to discuss an article or read a chapter and talk about it, but without an established purpose, often you will get a disorganized mess of different topics and ideas. Clearly setting the purpose for Accountable Talk helps to focus the students and allow them to come to the table better prepared. This is similar to the reading strategy of Determining Importance; in fact, I see it as one and the same. I believe it is my responsibility to set the purpose for the talk so that students understand that they are working within a definitive set of boundaries. For example, during our historical fiction unit based on *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* by Avi, I announced, "Today the purpose of our Accountable Talk is to discuss all the examples of change in Charlotte's character that you have highlighted in Chapter 14." This gives the students a framework for their discussion and helps them to stay on topic throughout Accountable Talk sessions.

Fishbowls and Accountable Talk

When all of the strategies have been introduced, modeled, and practiced, and the purpose for reading clearly determined, it is time to give Accountable Talk a try. Accountable Talk is another term for a group discussion around a common text. Readers' workshops, literature circles, and buzzing effectively (Fountas and Pinnell) are some other familiar concepts that are closely related to Accountable Talk. Yet, the biggest difference between those popular discussion methods and Accountable Talk is the free-flowing nature of Accountable Talk. There are no set roles for the participants, no assigned positions or leadership, just a manageable list of expectations to follow and the assumption that all discussion participants will come to the table prepared. An effective way to showcase or introduce Accountable Talk is to conduct a "fishbowl" in which a selected group of between 4–6 students participates in an Accountable Talk discussion in front of their peers. The larger group of children who are not chosen for the fishbowl are responsible for taking notes on what they notice (body language, eye contact, active listening) and what they hear (specific Accountable Talk language, piggybacking, and use of the six reading strategies). I call these students outside the fishbowl the "observation gallery."

It's one thing to ask students to discuss an article or read a chapter and talk about it, but without an established purpose, often you will get a disorganized mess of different topics and ideas. Clearly setting the purpose for Accountable Talk helps to focus the students and allow them to come to the table better prepared.

Debriefing

After the Accountable Talk fishbowl is over, the debriefing session begins. Here, I offer everyone in both the fishbowl and the observation gallery a chance to share their observations and ideas related to the original discussion. I prompt the students with questions such as, How did you know that the participants were prepared for the discussion? What method did the participants use to get started? Did you notice any examples of eye contact or active listening during the discussion? Did you notice the use of Accountable Talk language? Which of the six key reading strategies did you notice being used in the discussion? We talk about what seemed to work well and what did not. This student-driven constructive criticism is a meaningful and productive method to wrap up our discussion.

Accountable Talk can be done simultaneously with several groups as well. It's fascinating to walk around and listen in on the various conversations, to see which students are actively participating and which students are more reserved. I often hear original thoughts that I have not yet considered about the text we are reading.

Examples of Student Talk

Later in the school year, I initiated a reader's workshop related to Holocaust-themed literature. It is important to note that our primary purpose in reading these books was to highlight and discuss examples of humanity and inhumanity toward others. Going into this end-of-year Accountable Talk, my students already had a significant level of background knowledge about the Holocaust, its history and outcomes, based on a classroom reading of *Hana's Suitcase* by Karen Levine. They had also participated in many Accountable Talk sessions by this point, as evidenced by the following high-level comments from fifth-grade students:

- Regarding *Destined to Live: The True Story of a Child in the Holocaust* (Greuner): "Humanity is seen when a boy in one family becomes like a brother to his rescuers even though he isn't related to them. Humanity is when a person feels less alone and comforted by another person."
- When reading *I Am a Star: Child of the Holocaust* (Auerbacher): "I have a question about the book, which is, why did Hitler lie to his countrymen if he was trying to help them?"
- During *Heroes of the Holocaust: True Stories of Rescues by Teens* (Zullo): "Wearing the yellow star was embarrassing and humiliating for the Jewish people. It was a way for the Nazis to take away their dignity and humanity."
- Also when reading *Heroes of the Holocaust*: "I made a connection to the Underground Railroad from slavery times in our country. The people who helped the Jews during the Holocaust were taking risks just like the conductors on the Underground Railroad."
- Another comment from *Heroes of the Holocaust*: "When the author says, 'dodging bullets,' I inferred that she meant there was a lot of danger around."
- Regarding *Behind the Secret Window* (Toll): "When Nellie couldn't go to school anymore and lost her friends, I made a connection to the character, Ellen, in *Number the Stars* [Lowry], who also could not go to school when the Nazis came."

You can see in the above examples that the students were readily applying the six reading strategies to these various texts while always keeping in mind the purpose for the Accountable Talk. Each table's discussion reflected a different book related to the Holocaust, yet they all shared a common overarching purpose for their talk and practiced similar techniques for effective literature discussion.

Accountable Talk as Assessment

Using Accountable Talk as an assessment tool is something that I did not expect to find useful or manageable for myself. However, it soon became one of my most frequently implemented and convenient formative assessment tools as the year progressed. I often would precede a writing assignment with a session of Accountable Talk, allowing the children to think through an important open response question with their peers before putting pen to paper on their own.

Accountable Talk assessment can be used successfully in any content area, not just English language arts, and English teachers would do well to encourage their colleagues in other disciplines to

use talk to help their students develop more sophisticated reading skills. For example, math teachers might engage their students in a weekly Problem of the Week Accountable Talk, giving students a chance to share their strategies for solving a weekly math problem. Science teachers might want to test students' schema on a particular topic and use the results of student-led discussions to develop more meaningful essential questions before launching into an upcoming unit of study. Accountable Talk is a terrific way of solidifying the abstract historical events of the Social Studies curriculum, too. Students might participate in an Accountable Talk where they are asked to discuss ways the Constitution benefits all of us in our everyday lives. Listening in on these conversations, as I walk around the room, it would not take long for me to determine which concepts need further clarification and which ones the children really understand.

On the developmental spectrum of children and adolescents, verbal expression comes before written expression. Accountable Talk offers them a way to feel successful about expressing their ideas and, in some ways, levels the playing field within our heterogeneous public school classrooms. Accountable Talk works for many students, regardless of their personalities, learning styles, or academic abilities. Reluctant writers come forth and shine around the Accountable Talk table, and more cautious students learn to be confident in their observations. High-energy talkers learn to wait their turn and quiet students are assured a safe forum to explore and speak. Piggybacking off of each other's ideas inspires those students who might not have grasped the meaning of a particular piece of text as easily as their peers. They are able to hear their classmates explain a concept and often find themselves wanting to add on to it. Finally, there is an unspoken element of peer pressure that is inherent in the Accountable Talk forum. Coming to the table prepared for the talk becomes important to the group as a whole and most students are reluctant to let their classmates down.

Final Observations

As the school year came to a close, I looked for a way to sum up all the wonderful work we had accomplished in our lab classroom. I thought, why not run one final Accountable Talk session during which my students could discuss Accountable Talk? I made sure to tell the students that I was looking for both positive and negative feedback, including suggestions as to how I could make the Accountable Talk experience better for my future students. The students loved the idea and eagerly awaited their group assignments. When the day of reckoning arrived, the students came to the table with feedback notes in hand. The following are some of their comments about the Accountable Talk experience:

- "Accountable Talk helped me understand what I was reading better because it showed me other people's perspectives and made me think about my reading in a different way."
- "It helped me learn to have a good conversation and to work together with other people."
- "I learned not to ignore other people's ideas and to listen to other people."
- "In the Accountable Talk I saw a picture of what I was reading by listening to other people's descriptions of the book."
- "I could write down my questions about what I was reading and bring them to the Accountable Talk."
- "In the Accountable Talk, other people noticed things about the reading that I didn't. We shared the things we both noticed with each other."
- "Accountable Talk can teach everybody to be more sociable, how to use the right words, how to work with others, and what to do if you are bad at making conversations."

What struck me about these comments was the students' recognition of how important collaborative discussions are to building positive relationships with others. I connected immediately to Maria Nichols's words from her book, *Comprehension through Conversation: The Power of Purposeful Talk in the Reading Workshop:* "It is through purposeful talk with others that we construct ideas and visions of possibility for ourselves and each other" (5). My students had gained an essential life skill in my classroom, one that they will carry throughout their school experience and into their future lives.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Supporting Student Comprehension in Content Area Reading" presents powerful techniques to encourage students to use peer talk and writing to enhance their understanding of content area texts. http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/supporting-student-comprehension-content-30517.html

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Watching Her Teach

—for George Ella Lyon

She is not afraid of the poem
when it rises within her
no matter where she is,
no matter who is watching.

When it rises within her
she turns her head, she listens.
No matter who is watching,
she parts her lips and smiles.

She turns her head, and listens—
the future is in her lengthening bones.
She parts her lips and smiles,
she welcomes it home.

The future is in her lengthening bones.
She stretches up tall to greet it,
she welcomes it home, and then,
there, before us all, is a poem.

—Portia B. Pennington

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Timothy Quinn and Todd Eckerson

Motivating Students to Read with Collaborative Reading Quizzes

Bored with low-level, time-consuming traditional reading quizzes, two teachers find a welcome improvement in collaboration.

One of the most important challenges a teacher faces is motivating his or her students to complete reading assignments and to complete them carefully. After all, if students bring to class a basic understanding of the text up for discussion, much deeper learning can occur than if the teacher is forced to spend time explaining the reading to students who either didn't read or did so in only a cursory fashion.

The standard solution is the reading quiz—a series of multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, or short-answer questions.

However, this strategy creates its own set of problems. First, such a commitment to quizzing generates a steady and occasionally overwhelming stream of paperwork. Second, making quizzes a part of every class period cuts into the precious time a teacher needs to accomplish significantly more meaningful tasks.

Most importantly, there is a pedagogical problem. The goal of the traditional reading quiz is singular: to reward those who have done the reading and to punish those who have not. Thus, it measures only what each student *has* remembered or learned and provides no further opportunity for learning.

Nevertheless, these traditional reading quizzes, if administered differently, can be used to achieve much more. Without changing the original multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, or short-answer questions, a teacher can create a more enriching experience merely by placing those same questions in a different context.

Enter the "collaborative quiz," an opportunity both to ensure that one's students have read carefully and to provide them with an engaging classroom experience. In short, we propose allowing students to work collaboratively on quizzes, determining answers and crafting explanations *together.*

The Collaborative Quiz offers at least five benefits:

- It provides the standard incentive to read carefully.
- It allows the teacher to give the students immediate feedback.
- It reduces the busywork of grading quizzes.
- It raises the quality of class discussion.
- It serves as a vehicle for collaborative, student-centered learning.

Given these benefits, the Collaborative Quiz offers a depth and range not possible with the traditional reading quiz.

The Discovery of the Collaborative Quiz

Like many effective strategies teachers use, the Collaborative Quiz came about somewhat by accident—the result of a combination of student whining, teacher frustration, and spur-of-the-moment innovation. Having prepared a standard reading quiz on the previous night's assignment, the teacher, Tim Quinn (a coauthor of this article), ran into standard student resistance: "Mr. Quinn, do we have to take another one of these quizzes?" "Mr. Quinn, how much do these quizzes count?" "Mr. Quinn, can't you put this quiz off until the next class?"

In exasperation, Quinn threw his hands in the air and relented . . . a bit. "I'll tell you what," he said. "Why don't you just work together as a class on the quiz, and I'll give you all the same grade."

Then Quinn handed out copies of the quiz. "OK, get to work," he told them. "You have 20 minutes, you'll hand in one copy, and then I'll grade it right here in front of you." And thus, the Collaborative Quiz was born.

What happened next was as unexpected as it was wonderful. The class went to work; that was to be expected. But what Quinn did not anticipate was the high quality of the discussion that ensued as the students worked together to gain consensus on their answers. While the class was a little shy at first, one person did eventually offer a response. No one was critical. In fact, most seemed prepared to accept that answer.

The students *discovered* on their own what Quinn had planned on *telling them!*

However, even more discussion ensued when Mr. Quinn muttered, "Remember, this is a quiz." Two students spoke up, each modifying the initial response. The tipping point came when someone else jumped in, telling the others that she thought they were "way off." The students argued back and forth, citing text when necessary, and eventually they reached relative consensus based on logic and evidence—having exactly the type of conversation that teachers, including Quinn, aim to stimulate each class.

What's more, not only did the Collaborative Quiz provoke an exceptional discussion, but it also met the objectives for the lesson that Quinn had planned to follow his traditional reading quiz. Almost all the points he had intended to make about the reading assignment were brought up during the student discussion. The quiz may have taken more time than Quinn intended, but it was well worth it. If the reading quiz he had prepared were administered as he had originally intended, then the students would have been given ten minutes to take the quiz (silently), followed by, at best, a teacher-centered question-and-answer discussion, or at worst a 30-minute lecture to a group of passive students. Instead, the Collaborative Quiz took almost the entire 40-minute class, but the discussion the quiz prompted was the best lesson that Quinn could have taught: it was engaged, spirited, organized, and it happened *without* the teacher's constant prodding, probing, and cajoling.

In other words, the students *discovered* on their own what Quinn had planned on *telling them*!

And there were more reasons why the Collaborative Quiz was a success. Rather than just handing in a blank quiz, the students who did not know the answers were obligated to listen to and were given incentive to ask questions of their classmates. Conversely, rather than just writing down the answers and being done with the quiz, the students who did the reading carefully were now required to explain and to defend their views.

Still another surprise awaited Quinn. After the discussion was over and the answers written, Quinn assessed the quiz in front of the class. In so doing, he effectively cut the busywork involved with a commitment to quizzing down to almost nothing, and there was only one grade to assign to all the students. More importantly, grading the quiz proved to be a learning activity itself. For, as Quinn went over the questions, the students attempted to convince him that their answers were correct. For example, a wrong answer graded in the traditional manner leaves little room for discussion. With the Collaborative Quiz, however, a wrong answer becomes an opportunity for a student to defend his or her alternative point of view. Most significantly, during the back and forth that ensues, a teacher can provide the students with *immediate* feedback rather than making them wait until the next day when the quiz may already be a distant memory.

Further Thoughts on the Collaborative Quiz

In further processing what had occurred, we realized that the Collaborative Quiz could be administered in a wide variety of formats. For instance, a teacher could give the quiz to the whole class or have the students work on the quiz in smaller groups. A teacher could also have students hand in one copy for the whole group or make them each write out their own answers and choose one to grade at random. The options are numerous.

Ultimately, we realized that the Collaborative Quiz could effectively replace teacher-centered discussion by providing coverage of material roughly equivalent to the coverage that this traditional teaching approach yields, but with the added advantage of doing so in the midst of an engaging, often heated

discussion that students conducted largely on their own. This is not to say that the teacher cedes control of the class to the students. He or she can offer hints and redirect discussion down more fruitful paths, as needed. Ultimately, however, the teacher's true control over the direction of the class rests in the content and form of the questions that he or she chooses to put on the quiz. Nevertheless, the Collaborative Quiz shifts the focus from the teacher to the student and engages the class more completely.

Responding to Problems of Collaborative Quizzes

Three legitimate problems with the Collaborative Quiz need consideration: the problem of the Free Rider, the problem of the Dominant Student, and the problem of Fair Grades.

First, the **Free Rider.** While students can earn a good grade on the Collaborative Quiz without doing their reading, they are forced to write down, and sometimes explain, the correct answer, so at least indirectly they learn a portion of what they should have gotten out of the reading. Furthermore, because of the public dimension of the Collaborative Quiz, one's free-rider status will quickly become evident to the teacher and the rest of the class. This will probably serve as disincentive for taking a free ride on a consistent basis.

The second related problem is that of the **Dominant Student.** When a strong student in the class knows all the answers, she or he may unduly influence the conversation. This would further enable the free riders and might ultimately diminish the engaged discussion otherwise encouraged by the Collaborative Quiz. However, because the Collaborative Quiz does not require the teacher to cede all authority, a number of techniques can help: the teacher may ask the students to do the quiz in smaller groups, the teacher may limit how much any one person is allowed to speak, or the teacher may put a different person in charge of each question.

The third problem is the issue of **Fair Grades.** Many may ask, "How can you give all the students in class the same grade when some are doing more work than others and some understand concepts at a higher level than others? That simply isn't fair!" The answer is that the Collaborative Quiz should be only one of many assessments used. To over-rely on any one strategy—the Collaborative Quiz included—would open up the teacher to legitimate claims of unfairness. On the other hand, when used as one part of a multifaceted assessment strategy, the Collaborative Quiz has the power to transform a reading quiz into a dynamic and engaging learning activity without compromising the integrity of each student's overall grade.

In addition to these issues, there may be those who ask, "What's so special about this? Isn't the Collaborative Quiz the same thing as giving the students a worksheet to do together or in groups?" Well, in some ways it is, but there is one critical difference: It is not a worksheet; it is a *quiz.* While this may not make a difference for the teacher, it makes a difference for most students. When students are aware that something counts as a test (or a quiz), the stakes are raised, and students inevitably take it more seriously.

The Collaborative Quiz is not only a better alternative to the traditional reading quiz, it can also add variety to your assessments and effectively motivate students to do the reading; it may also prompt your class's finest discussions.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The ReadWriteThink.org Strategy Guide "Promoting Student Self-Assessment" shares a number of methods for promoting student self-assessment, which can help teachers better respond to students' learning needs. http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/promoting-student-self-assessment-30102.html

Rebecca Gorman and Gloria Schultz Eastman

"I See What You Mean": Using Visuals to Teach Metaphoric Thinking in Reading and Writing

The authors suggest classroom activities for actively engaging studen in analyzing visual imag to improve their reading and writing skills.

English teachers have a unique opportunity to expand and develop the way their students think. Too often, students are comfortable in thinking about reading and writing processes in a concrete or linear way. They are used to "right" or "wrong" answers in their other studies and look for the same in their English assignments. While teachers often use the phrase "there are no wrong answers," many students are suspicious of this notion. The terms that teachers use with such ease—*metaphor, simile, allusion, personification*—can be frustrating for students who are hesitant to venture into thinking patterns beyond what is obviously and securely "right." However, English teachers, using imagery and visual metaphors in conjunction with literary texts and writing exercises, may guide students away from such concrete or linear thinking and into the rich world of symbol and subjective thought. When students are freed from the pressure of a right or wrong interpretation of a text, or of a correct or incorrect use of a symbol in a piece of creative writing, students may read more deeply, express themselves more creatively, and work with words and language in a way that is both enjoyable and directly applicable to themselves and their thoughts and feelings. This freedom of thought, while daunting at first to some students, ultimately leads to an ownership of their work, and when practiced in a supportive environment, to a sense of accomplishment in their creativity.

Quite often, teachers overlook the extent to which students surround themselves with visual stimuli, not only in television shows and commercials but also in computer avatars, music videos, and video games. Their acceptance of these stimuli, however, is largely passive—they see but do not give the visuals much thought. Ellen Krueger and Mary T. Christel have observed that teachers must "combat the passive orientation that some students have to examining visual images and begin to train students to make critical judgments about images that we take for granted in our media-saturated culture" (4).

In this article, we suggest ways for actively engaging students in analyzing visual images to improve their reading and writing skills. Once they are made aware of the frequency with which they read and use visual images in their daily lives, students are much more likely to successfully interpret literary images in written texts and to use imagery in their writing.

Visual Linking with Literary Texts

Inviting students into a text is an essential, but sometimes challenging, aspect of teaching literature. The process of visual linking can facilitate the student to text connection. Judith Langer discusses this process as the first in her paradigm of four "envisionments." According to Langer, students are, at first, outside the world that has been created by the writer and must step into that world and move through it, making sense of it, before they can begin to understand plot and characterization. Reluctant readers may read just a few

pages and find themselves unable to move into the world of the fiction writer; many will simply stop reading or resort to SparkNotes or Wikipedia. Photographs and film clips can be effective in remedying this difficulty: photos of internment camps while introducing Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar* or of 19th-century California gold mining while introducing Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," for example, provide students with an idea of the setting and allow them to enter the story.

Helping students to enter into the mood and theme of a text is more challenging, but using visuals can help. When teaching Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness,* for example, a print of Monet's *Waterloo Bridge* or J. M. W. Turner's *The Slave Ship* will encourage students to think about a world in which objects are so blurred and indistinct that it may be difficult to make sense of actions. Teachers may then move from a discussion of the painting to a discussion of the modernist agenda of abstraction: Why would a painter wish to portray a scene that is so indistinct, so impressionistic? What mood is created and how does that mood affect the viewer's sense of the scene? Understanding that the visual artist intends to create a subjective impression on a viewer—not a right or wrong answer—can help students understand how a novelist uses words to create a tone.

Once this visual to text link is made for students, they can explore the specific methods that might motivate a writer to create an impressionistic piece of writing (for example, a work such as *Heart of Darkness* that employs seemingly confused plot development, a narrator who is unclear about the motives and behaviors of the characters, a setting that is often described in terms of fog and obscured vision). Reading aloud from Conrad's novella, stopping to question the text and pointing out the ways in which Conrad conveys an impression of confusion and dread, can ensure that students understand the style of the text and the mood it creates. Showing photographs of the Belgian colonial enterprise in Africa is helpful in allowing students to see the *literal* setting, but it is not as helpful as impressionistic paintings for helping them understand mood and technique.

Using Fine Art to Teach Metaphoric Thinking

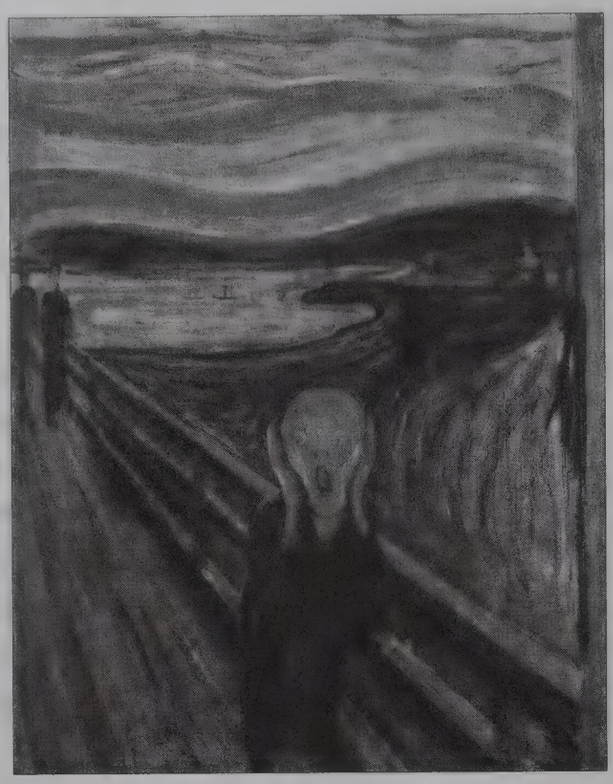
Too often, the language arts curriculum suggests that the only way culture represents meaning is through words on a page. Yet visual systems of meaning are used by students in the clothes they select, the websites they view, and the doodles on their notebooks. Teachers can use such visual symbols to encourage students to think in metaphorically sophisticated ways about both visual and print text.

Understanding that the visual artist intends to create a subjective impression on a viewer—not a right or wrong answer—can help students understand how a novelist uses words to create a tone.

Introducing a piece of fine art that has thematic bearing on the unit or literary text under consideration is a way to make students aware of artists' choices in how to convey visual meaning. As teachers and students work through the task of interpreting the visual text, they begin to draw parallels to literary texts.

In this exercise, teachers point out the categories of observation that students are to apply to the piece of art that they will be examining in conjunction with a literary work. Teachers should start with visuals first: Raphael's *The School of Athens* and Munch's *The Scream*—two paintings quite distinct

Raphel's *The School of Athens*

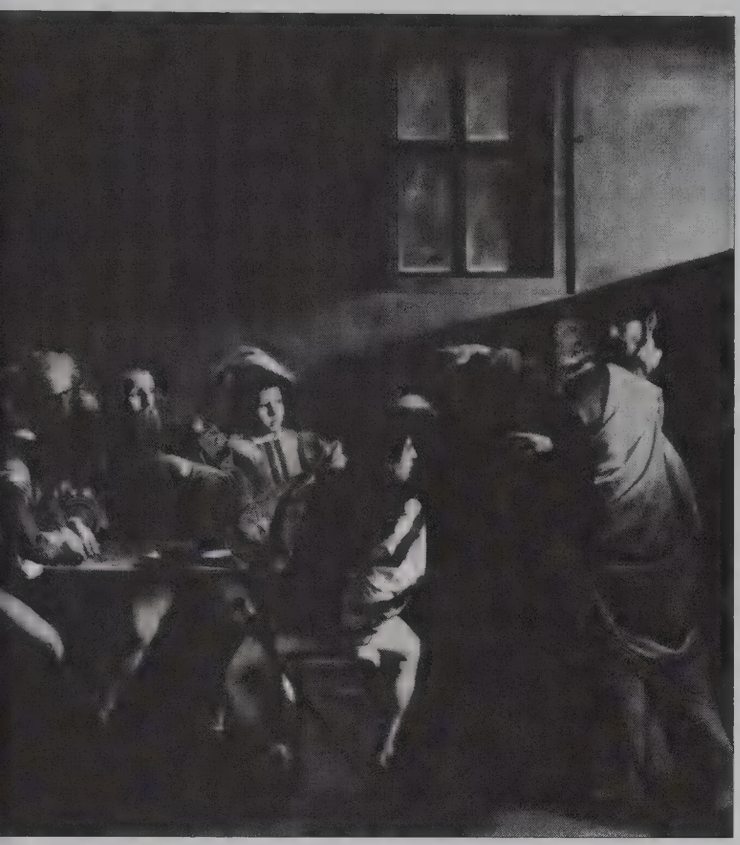


Munch's *The Scream*

in their styles and contexts—work well. We ask students to analyze these and other works of art using the list of concepts below (we organize them into a chart on a handout with blanks for the students to fill in their analysis of each concept).

- Realism versus Abstractness—Does the painting represent reality in a photographic way? Has the artist distorted a realistic representation in some way?
- Light—Where does the light seem to come from? What time of day does it seem to be? Where do the shadows fall? How sharp or diffuse are they? Which objects or characters are in shadow or light? Are any only partially in shadow? What is obscured? Are there reflections? Clear or distorted? Full or partial?
- Shapes—Which shapes—such as spheres, cylinders, cubes, blocks—are used, contrasted, or repeated? Which elements seem heavy or strong? Are some shapes merely suggested?
- Lines—Are lines sharp or diffuse? Visible or painted over? Do lines suggest movement or are they static? Which lines seem strong or light and delicate? Does the artist use more curves or more straight lines? How does the artist use angles?
- Paint—Are the brush strokes smooth or rough? Is the paint thick or thin? Do the brush strokes match the subject matter, or is there a deliberate mismatch between them?
- Colors—Are the colors warm or cool? How many tones or tints of the same colors are used? Are the colors associated with a certain object or character? Do bright colors, such as white or red, draw the eye? Do shadowy colors such as gray and brown dominate?
- Composition—How are objects and characters arranged? Which are closer or farther away from the viewer's eye? Is the point of view looking down, looking up, or on eye level with the scene? What is the focal point or center of interest? Is there more than one center of interest?
- Foreground and Background—How do these emphasize or detract from the center of interest? What objects or natural elements are included in the foreground or background? Are either of these significantly different in color, light, tone, or composition from the center of interest?
- Narrative—Which characters face the viewer directly? Which are angled away and to what degree? What kinds of contrast are employed among the characters? Which movements or gestures are illustrated or suggested? What are the colors and textures of the clothing? How do the fabrics fold or drape? Are fabrics soft or stiff? Filmy or heavy? What are facial expressions, the body positions, and the body language? (This last question can be applied to animals and even, in some instances, to plants and other objects.)
- Mood and Tone—What is the overall mood or tone? Which of the other concepts contribute to this mood or tone?
- Emotional Response—What is your first emotional response to the painting? Does the response remain the same or shift after you have studied it for a period of time?

After understanding these visual concepts, teachers can guide students to look at images from advertising or film stills to practice their ability to analyze each concept and to make simple descriptions, then discuss why the artist might have made these choices.



Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew* (From The Yorck Project: 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei, DVD-ROM, 2002).

Teachers can now move on to a painting that is thematically tied to the students' reading. Examples of linked paintings and texts include Alfred Lord Tennyson's and William Holman Hunt's *The Lady of Shallot*; Kenneth Grahame's and Arthur Suydam's *Wind in the Willows*; Jack London's *South Sea Tales* and the Tahitian paintings of Gauguin; and Edward Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology* and the paintings of Edward Hopper. Teachers can find a wealth of other such matches to facilitate the goals of their lessons.

In a mythology course, for example, we recommend teachers use Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew* to discuss the Hero's Journey, particularly the frequency with which heroes begin the quest by resisting a call to action. (Note: If the religious text and image is problematic, teachers may consider other works, such as *The Combat of Mars and Minerva* by Jacques-Louis David, or even Norman Rockwell's *Sporting Boys.*) Teachers can project the image on the screen and also provide good color copies of the painting, enclosed in plastic protectors to withstand handling, to enable students to examine the painting closely. Students can work independently to describe what they see in the

Jacques-Louis David's *The Combat of Mars and Minerva*

painting, using some or all of the concepts described above. They then bring their notes to a small group to take up the following discussion questions, which can also serve a discussion of how heroes in mythology frequently refuse calls to action, at least at first:

- Plot—Read the passage from the New Testament (Matthew 9:9) to understand the brief plot. How has Caravaggio changed or elaborated on the written text?
- Characterization—Describe and analyze each of the characters in the painting, moving from left to right. Consider all the categories of observation that apply to the people depicted in the painting. Can you figure out who each character is? Begin to analyze why Caravaggio painted each in the way he did. What is he saying about each character?
- Setting—Consider the overall tone, mood, and atmosphere of the painting. What is your first emotional response? Does it change as you study the painting? Study the room represented in the painting. Why is there so much wall? Why is there a high window and a dark hallway? Study the variation in wall texture and color. What is the function of these visual choices?
- Theme—What is the religious theme of this work? Is there a competing secular theme?
- Style and Technique—Refer to your notes and make some generalizations about style and technique in this painting. Can you draw

any conclusions about the symbolism of these visual images?

- Extra Credit: Caravaggio makes a visual allusion to a famous painting by an earlier painter of the Italian Renaissance. Can you identify it?[1]

One of the pleasures of the full class discussion that follows the small-group work is that students and teacher are genuinely exploring a visual text for meaning. The teacher is not the art expert but merely the discussion leader; this often results in more risk-taking and a livelier exploration of a new area of knowledge for all involved.

Teachers may choose to follow this activity by allowing students to find their own images that relate to an assigned reading. Poems or short stories that include many images, such as James Joyce's "Araby" or E. E. Cummings's "in Just-," are good choices. Students may find images to share with the class or even create and explicate their own images. Students may even imagine (or even produce) a film of the story or poem and describe how the sets and costumes would look. They may make a set of rough sketches—a storyboard—of a scene from that imagined film and explain the decisions that they made.

Abstract images can prompt students to delve deeply and freely into their imaginations.

When students are given visual artistic freedom over a text in these ways, they begin to feel a sense of ownership of their opinions. Often, after these exercises and discussions, the students most likely to resist interpreting images in a literary text are more willing, even eager, to do so.

Metaphoric Stimuli: Using Abstract Images

Abstract images can prompt students to delve deeply and freely into their imaginations. For this exercise, teachers provide students with several abstractions of color, line, and texture. Teachers provide, for example, a box of crayons for the colors. Students pick two or three crayons at random. For the patterns, a good resource is the book *1000 Patterns, Design through the Centuries* by Drucilla Cole; black-and-white copies of the patterns are best, as they will not interfere with students' color choices. For textures, teachers provide students with swatches of various fabrics or materials (craft stores and household items can be useful) everything from burlap to silk, from wrapping paper to ribbon to corrugated cardboard.

With these materials in hand—a few colors, a pattern, and a texture—students begin to create. Teachers guide students to associate concrete qualities to the abstractions of the colors, textures, and patterns, and allow students to freewrite lists for each. Teachers should encourage students to use words that not only have to do with sight but also with the other senses. For example, an orange crayon and a yellow crayon together might make a student think of roaring fire, of flowers, or of a cereal box. A pattern with sharp lines and irregular angles might be busy, or noisy, or childish. An old piece of waxed paper might be slick, or messy, or it might remind a student of a grimy old window.

Now, the student can begin to make connections—students should feel free to select and arrange the qualities of the materials they have listed, eliminating any that "don't fit." With the example above, the student might select an image of a noisy fire seen through a grimy old window. Coloring with yellow and orange on the "noisy" pattern and layering the old waxed paper on top may enhance this image. Or, the student might choose the path of the messy child, playing with a cereal box. As long as all three attributes—color, line, and texture—are incorporated into the student's creation of the concrete image, the lesson works.

Once the image is created, the student is ready to start writing. Teachers may use this lesson for the creation of a short-short story: What is that child looking for in the cereal box? Does the child find it? Or a free-verse poem: What can the writer say about a fire seen through a window? Can such an image become a metaphor for a deep feeling or emotion? When given the permission to be purely creative, within parameters that produce a level of comfort and guidance, students create innovative, evocative work without the anxiety of creating something from nothing. This strategy is a useful tool for young writers to use in brainstorming pieces they write on their own.

Exercises that require students to create from visual impetus can be difficult for teachers to assess, as reactions to colors, lines, and patterns are subjec-

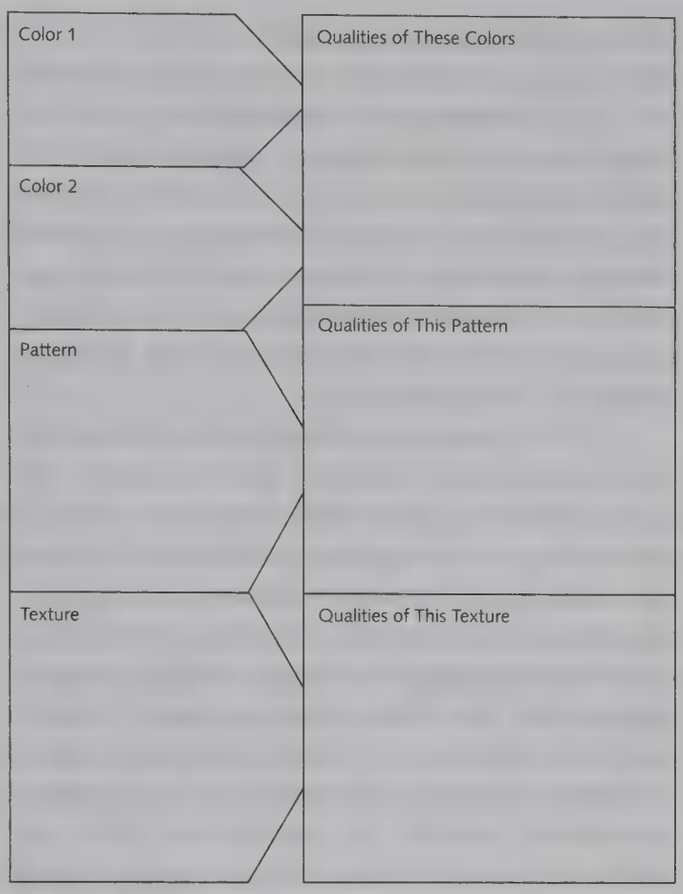


FIGURE 1. Swatch Board

tive. The color blue might mean serenity to one student and despair to another. Therefore, it is essential to have students explicate their processes. The creation of a "swatch board" (see fig. 1)—a palette on which the colors, patterns, and textures that the student has used have been arranged and described—greatly enhances students' oral or written explanations of their processes. Swatch boards can be made from a plain piece of white paper on which students color in sections with their crayons, attach a cutout of their patterns and a piece of their texture, and then elaborate on each in a correlating box. All brainstorming and freewriting about the students' visual prompts should be turned in for assessment. Requiring students to analyze their images, orally or in written form, helps students stay responsible for and aware of their processes. These auxiliary exercises are invaluable to objective assessment of the students' work.

Reading Color to Enhance Reading for Inference

Having used color, pattern, and texture in their writing, students can use these new skills in reading for inference in a literary text. Students now understand that color, whether seen in a visual image or read in a textual image, is a metaphor. Using a reversal of the previous activity, for example, students might select a color that represents each of the main characters in the novel under study and justify the color choice by providing selected passages from the novel.

A bit of basic color study will support this thinking, as the teacher points out that the warm color families of red, yellow, and orange suggest tones of passion, happiness, excitement, and energy, while the color families of blue, green, or purple suggest calm, meditation, nature, thoughtfulness, or even melancholy (Boggs and Petrie 208–10). It is useful to note that color associations can be culture-specific, and an examination of varied cultural color associations, especially as they apply to non-Western texts, adds depth to the discussion.

From a general discussion of colors and their associations, teachers can deepen the study by asking students to consider the values—the tints (lighter values such as pink and lavender) and shades (darker values such as crimson and aubergine)—of individual colors. Peggy Albers encourages students to play with colored pencils to explore values in the making of meaning, as she explains that "authors use color to express ideas, convey messages, evoke feelings, and accentuate areas of interest" (52).

Indeed, students will be surprised how often color is mentioned in literary texts, and in a discussion of color as it appears in their reading, the exact shades that come to students' minds makes a great deal of difference in the color connotations. For example, what does the tint of pink suggest that is different from the shade of deep crimson? Linking this color study with textual analysis, teachers may have students explain which of these, pink or crimson, would be appropriate for Hester Prynne's scarlet letter. When Alice looks through the door to the lovely garden in the first chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* does she see a bright spring green or a shade of sage green? What is the difference in the moods created by the different colors?

Finally, teachers can introduce students to monochromatic artwork; including the functions of contrast in using a single color or one full color photo in a monochromatic visual scheme, teachers

may then extend this thinking to the metaphors contained in a monochromatic verbal description of setting in a text. A useful website for learning about the messages conveyed by color is Pantone's Color Institute (Pantone.com). Michael J. Gillette's *Theatrical Design and Production* includes useful chapters on color theory and applications of color in the theater. In all this work, the emphasis should be on reading the messages the color conveys.

To develop their ability to "read" color, teachers may have students analyze print advertizing for the implied meaning of the color choices made by the graphic artist to sell the product. For instance, they may ask the students to write a several-page analysis of a piece of advertising from a magazine such as *Sports Illustrated, Vogue,* or *The New Yorker.* While analyzing the visual elements of the ad, the student must arrive at a thesis about the tone, mood, and implied meaning of the visuals and their purpose in encouraging the viewer to purchase the product. Using such an activity should accomplish two goals: (1) teaching students the techniques of visual communication for them to become critical readers of such messages and, perhaps, be less blindly manipulated by them; (2) teaching students the skills of reading visual metaphors.

Students who are working to create a character in their own writing may find it helpful to gather and arrange pictures of people that reflect the image of the character they have in mind. The collage element is essential to this process, as a single picture cannot express the full range of a rounded character.

With such skills in hand, students may look at color-rich poems, such as those of William Carlos Williams, and stories, such as those of Edgar Allan Poe, with minds more attuned to the careful placement of the color-symbols.

Character Collaging

Often, students who have grown up with TV, film, advertising, and magazines tend to be preoccupied with the way characters in their reading look, from the shoes they wear to the style of their hair. Often, the authors of young adult novels will implicitly or explicitly describe the physical appearance of characters within their first few pages. As Louisa May Alcott writes in *Little Women,* "As young readers like to know 'how people look,' we will take this moment to give them a little sketch of the four sisters" (13). Readers derive satisfaction from these visual stimuli in texts because people make clear and distinct decisions, fair or not, based on how other people look. In critical reading and in creative writing, any exercise that requires students to picture a character may take advantage of people's preoccupations with external appearance by using the "character collage" exercise.

While authors may describe their characters clearly, the picture that the words make in the minds of various readers will often vary widely. If the reading is in first-person voice, how much can the reader trust the narrator for an accurate depiction of himself or herself? If in third-person voice, even rather complete descriptions such as "straggly, waist-length, dirty-blond hair, very pale eyebrows, and protuberant eyes . . . . this girl gave off an aura of distinct dottiness" (Rowling 185) still leave a great deal of room for the imagination. When students are allowed to create a collage of pictures that express the characters that they are reading about, given freedom to find a character's face, posture, attitude, or "aura," picturing the story and relating to the characters comes more easily. Furthermore, students often find it quite surprising that others picture the characters in a story differently.

Again, this exercise works just as well "in reverse." Students who are working to create a character in their own writing may find it helpful to gather and arrange pictures of people that reflect the image of the character they have in mind. The collage element is essential to this process, as a single picture cannot express the full range of a rounded character. Teachers should have students find a collection of pictures—a face, a pose, a body type, a movement, a style of clothing, an expression—and work with students to arrange these elements in a collage to help them visualize their character.

This exercise is particularly helpful when the character the student is reading or writing differs from that student's personal demographic. If a student is white, middle-class, and suburban, and that student is attempting to read or write about an elderly black woman from post-Katrina New Orleans, a range of photographs can stimulate the student's imagination in ways that simply thinking about the character could never do. The collage of

pictures might include a weathered face, elderly hands, an aged person in the act of walking, and a picture of people stranded in the flooded city.

Once arranged, these pictures act as a touchstone: students can use them to imagine voice, attitude, and diction. Whether other readers imagine exactly the same woman as is shown in the student's collage is not important; the reader's or writer's clear and distinct knowledge of the feel of the character is. These concrete images become a metaphor; the metaphor becomes the character.

Teachers should provide a wide range of pictures for students to look through to arrange their collages. *Entertainment Weekly* and *Vogue* are not enough. Pictures from *National Geographic, Life, Smithsonian,* cooking magazines, health magazines, and especially photography magazines give students a much richer range to choose from. Alternatively, students might find useful photographs with some well-placed words in an Internet image search.

Conclusion

In this age of visual culture, both reading and writing may be greatly enhanced by the addition of visuals. Students consume information differently from students of even just ten years ago. The sheer volume of and popularity of iPods, iPhones, podcasts, video games, and Internet videos speak to this different kind of student: a student who consumes visually as well as through the written word. Today's students organize information not merely by naming—the learning of the definitions—but by sight and context. Teachers of language arts need only tap into this innate sense of the visual, to use these visuals as a basis for lessons on active visual literacy, to expand the students' thinking. The visual nature of the students' world is already in place and is an enjoyable and comfortable tool that teachers need only tap into in their lessons on metaphoric thinking.

Note

1. Caravaggio alludes to the *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Analyzing Symbolism, Plot, and Theme in *Death and the Miser*" encourages students to transfer the analytical skills that they use when reading literature to other forms of artistic expression through an exploration of the underlying meaning and symbolism in the early Renaissance painting *Death and the Miser* by Hieronymous Bosch. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/analyzing-symbolism-plot-theme-833.html

Janis M. Harmon, Elizabeth Buckelew-Martin, and Karen D. Wood

The Cognitive Vocabulary Approach to Word Learning

The authors provide an overview of research in vocabulary instruction and then explain a pedagogical approach th highlights metacognition and visual thinking. Mar classroom examples are described.

English teachers face myriad demands every day that include not only helping students read literature in interesting and engaging ways but also attending to the needs of students challenged by the demands of more complex and sophisticated texts. Vocabulary learning is at the heart of this struggle for many students, especially for English language learners and students who have difficulty with literacy skill development. Obviously, a lack of vocabulary knowledge limits students' understanding of a passage and also hinders their ability to engage in the deeper reading we aim for in our teaching. Yet, sometimes teaching word meanings before students read, while a widely accepted practice, may not be enough to ensure that comprehension will be enhanced for these learners who are burdened with language issues, learning problems, and other constraints that can lead to disengagement.

In this article we describe a cognitive strategies approach to vocabulary teaching and learning that can serve as a starting point for effective vocabulary instruction. This approach highlights the merging of important facets of vocabulary instruction with cognitive strategies used to comprehend texts. We begin by drawing attention to what we currently know about connections between vocabulary learning and reading comprehension and we describe a cognitive strategies vocabulary approach to instruction. Then Elizabeth Buckelew-Martin (Liz), a high school reading teacher, recounts her experience using this approach with her students.

Current Understandings of Vocabulary and Comprehension

Comprehension and vocabulary share a complex, reciprocal relationship: knowing more words enhances comprehension, just as reading and understanding texts builds vocabulary knowledge. Effective vocabulary instruction involves the orchestration of several instructional tasks promoted by many researchers (e.g., Beck, McKeown, and Kucan; Graves). We understand that instruction must include clear and easily understood definitions and a variety of experiences with word meanings in different contexts where students apply and transfer words in meaningful ways. Good instruction also includes helping students learn independent word learning strategies and developing word consciousness about the structure, order, and use of words.

Comprehension also involves a number of processes, including word identification and meaning, prior knowledge of a topic, and a host of strategic moves used by proficient readers to construct meaning (Pressley). These cognitive moves include making connections between existing knowledge and new text information, asking questions while reading, inferring ideas authors may not directly state, determining the importance of information, summarizing information, and monitoring understanding especially when ideas are unclear (Harvey and Goudvis). In addition, students must also be aware of their own thinking as they read. This metacognitive ability is a critical aspect of comprehension and is particularly evident in the behaviors

of proficient readers as they read challenging texts (Garner 727). Unfortunately, these same metacognitive behaviors are not as pronounced in the reading engagements of struggling readers, who appear to be constrained by their ability to identify and problem solve the meanings of unfamiliar words in natural contexts (Lubliner and Smetana).

The Cognitive Vocabulary Strategies Approach to Word Learning

The Cognitive Vocabulary Approach (CVA) is grounded in what we know about vocabulary and comprehension and focuses on explicit instruction of not only new word meanings but also on a metacognitive direction intended to help students develop independent word learning strategies that will serve them well in subsequent encounters with unfamiliar words. Students, especially challenged readers, need to develop stronger awareness of the thinking processes that contribute to effective understanding. CVA is flexible in terms of use and delivery in that the instruction can highlight a particular facet of the approach or each facet can be implemented sequentially. We can tailor the approach to fit students' needs and the purposes of word learning for a particular text.

There are three facets of the Cognitive Vocabulary Approach: identifying unfamiliar words, examining word meanings, and relating word meanings. As described below, within each of these facets we list questions for students to ask themselves to develop a greater sense of word awareness.

Identifying Unfamiliar Words

Important aspects of word learning include the ability to recognize unfamiliar words as well as to determine how important the words are for comprehension. Accomplishing this seemingly simple and straightforward task of identifying unknown words actually involves a level of metacognitive awareness that many struggling adolescent readers lack. Therefore, we need to help students consider these questions as they read material:

- What does it mean to acknowledge unfamiliar words?
- Why is it important to identify unfamiliar words that may be important?
- When do unfamiliar words need to be identified?
- What makes an unfamiliar word important?

Furthermore, students can develop metacognitive awareness by asking questions such as the ones listed next. Since metacognitive awareness involves thinking aloud to oneself, we provide examples of student thinking after the questions (in italics).

- Am I paying attention to what I am reading? *I am paying more attention to words I normally just skip over.*
- Do I see words I do not recognize or know what they mean? *In this paragraph, I see the word* ***extravagant*** *referring to spending by the king and queen in France during the 1780s.*
- Are these unfamiliar words getting in the way of what I am trying to read? *This seems to be a word I will need to be certain about because it is used again later in the selection.*

Examining Word Meanings

Also important for word learning is the ability to actively examine the meanings of unfamiliar words and the meanings of familiar words used in unfamiliar ways. In closely examining word meanings, students use several cognitive strategies that are the bedrock of comprehension. The strategies—which include activating prior knowledge, predicting, inferring, questioning, and drawing conclusions—enable students to grapple with the plausible meanings of the targeted words. To engage students in such examination, we list questions we would like students to ask and answer for themselves, such as the following:

There are three facets of the Cognitive Vocabulary Approach: identifying unfamiliar words, examining word meanings, and relating word meanings.

- What do I know about the topic we are studying? *We are talking about France owing a lot of money.*
- What do I know about this word? *It has the word part* ***extra,*** *which means a lot.*
- What are some other ways you think the author could use this word in reference to the topic? *The king and queen of France were extravagant and lived beyond their means.*

- What might the word mean? *I think it means a lot of spending.*
- How can I verify the meaning of the word? *I read ahead in the passage and think I am right, but I am going to check the online dictionary.*
- What does this meaning tell me about the topic of the passage? *It tells me that the former king and queen lived the high life and spent a great deal of France's money. They overdid the luxuries and were* ***extravagant*** *spenders.*

Relating Word Meanings

Once students have a general sense of a word's meaning, we must next help them internalize the meaning by deepening their understanding of the word. This is accomplished through activities that require students to associate word meanings to particular contexts and to relate the words to other words. In other words, we must help students learn how the words work: in what situations, by whom, and in relation to what concepts. From a cognitive perspective, these activities require students to make connections, classify and categorize information, and visualize—all higher-level cognitive strategies that aid in comprehension.

Metacognitive questions for this facet of word learning include the following:

- What does this word meaning make me think of? *It makes me think of Hollywood or Las Vegas and lifestyles of the rich and famous.*
- What other words do I know that are similar in meaning? *I know an expression "over the top" that is similar. The word* luxurious *is also like extravagant.*
- Under what broad category would this word belong? *It's a word that describes.*

There are many effective instructional approaches to help students with each aspect of the Cognitive Vocabulary Approach. We provide an activity chart in Figure 1 that illustrates the cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies along with explicit instructional support related to each of the three facets described previously.

FIGURE 1. Activity Chart for Cognitive Vocabulary Approach

Cognitive Vocabulary Approach	Cognitive Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Explicit Instructional Support
Identifying Unfamiliar Words	Identify unfamiliar words Determine importance	What does it mean to acknowledge unfamiliar words? Why do I need to identify unfamiliar words that may be important? When do I flag these words? How do I know if the word is important?	Provide opportunities for students to self-select unfamiliar words. Focus on constructing overall meaning of a passage and the contribution of unfamiliar words.
Examining Unfamiliar Words	Activate prior knowledge Predict Infer Draw conclusions	What do I know about the topic we are studying? What do I know about this word? In what ways might the author use this word in reference to the topic? What might the word mean? Verify the meaning of the word by checking the glossary or dictionary or by asking someone. What does this tell me about the topic of the passage?	Teach word-level strategies such as prefixes and roots. Teach context clues in relation to the overall meaning of the passage. Highlight connections between word meaning predictions from context and the meaning of the passage.
Relating Word Meanings	Connect Classify Categorize Visualize	This word reminds me of . . . This word belongs with other words and terms such as . . . This word fits under the category of . . .	Use visual representations such as word maps and graphic organizers to illustrate relationships among words. Have students create symbols and select colors to help them remember word meanings.

Developing cognitive and metacognitive strategies is highly challenging for students and teachers and requires taking small steps toward building a strong vocabulary base and comprehension. While we have outlined and charted this cognitive approach to learning using three facets, we do not intend that this approach be construed as formulaic. Instead, we hope that teachers will make the modifications needed to address the specific learning needs of their students, as Liz demonstrates in the next section.

Using the Cognitive Vocabulary Approach in the Classroom

Liz teaches reading classes in a Title I high school that serves a high number of Hispanic students and where her classes contain English language learners, special education students, and other students who struggle with reading. In her own voice, she describes several scenarios in which she used the Cognitive Vocabulary Approach with her students at different times and with different texts.

Identifying Unfamiliar Words

I (Liz) began this facet of word learning from a metacognitive perspective by asking my students to write a journal entry addressing this question: When you are reading and you come across a word that you do not know, how do you react and respond? Student responses served as a springboard to a class discussion on vocabulary strategies and the importance of understanding word meanings. From a total of 45 students in several different classes, only five indicated that they even paid attention to unfamiliar words. The remaining students stated that, when they came across a word they did not know, they simply skipped over it. Comments included the following:

- I think that if I don't know the word, it might not be important and I can still figure out what I am reading even without that word.
- Sometimes I think if I just keep reading I will figure out what it means by the rest of the story.
- I just skip it, because if I don't know it, then it doesn't matter.

Students also indicated that they were used to having teachers provide them with a list of vocabulary words that they needed to know for reading. They had rarely been asked to select their own words for vocabulary. From their perspective, if the teacher did not provide them with the word and definition, then that word was not important enough to understand.

This was an eye-opening moment for me. I realized that we are not teaching our students the much-needed skill of being able to identify and determine the importance of understanding new words in reading. I also realized that we must create strategies that lead students, struggling readers in particular, to become metacognitive in their approach to understanding the meaning and importance of new words.

To help my students attend to unfamiliar words in more productive ways, I created a Vocabulary Identification and Rating Scale assignment (see fig. 2). To practice using the scale, I provided each

FIGURE 2. Vocabulary Identification and Rating Scale

Take a few minutes to read through the work we are going to read in class, looking for any words that you do not know. Highlight these words and write them down in the chart below. Next, rate how important you think each word may be to understanding the story by circling a number between 1 and 5. The importance scale is the following:

1—*not important at all*; I could read and understand the reading without knowing this word and it wouldn't matter
2—*not really important*; this word might be one I need to know but I can still understand the reading without it
3—*may or may not be important;* I can't decide whether or not I think knowing this word will be important
4—*kind of important;* I think this word may be pretty important to know, to help me understand the reading
5—*VERY important;* I can tell understanding this word is going to be a big part of me understanding the reading

Finally, give your best idea of what you think this word may mean in the third column. Include definitions, words that you have seen before that look similar to this one, and any other information that you have related to the meaning of the words.

Words I don't know:	How important I think this word may be:	What I think this word may mean:
	1 2 3 4 5	
	1 2 3 4 5	

student with a copy of a short, expository text: a biography of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As they scanned the text for unfamiliar words, they used a highlighter to mark them and then completed the rating scale. I moved around the room, observing and answering questions.

Twenty-six words were identified as unknown by at least four students each. These words represented both content specific words, such as *Gandhi, boycott, coalition,* and *manifesto,* as well as high-frequency words used across disciplines, including *inspiring, residence, assassinated, predominantly, segregation, intellectual,* and *burgeoning.* We then discussed the selected words, attending to how the students picked the words and to how important they thought each word was to understanding the biography.

Examining Word Meanings

This facet of word meanings coincided with our work on identifying new words as evidenced by the third column of the Vocabulary Identification and Rating Scale, "What I think this word may mean." Cognitively, students had to activate their prior knowledge about the word or parts of the word to predict the word meaning based on the context. By thinking about what they may already know, students had to draw conclusions regarding their overall level of understanding of what the word means and how it might apply to the text. Given the nature of some of the selected words, this close examination of word meanings allowed for discussions about word parts.

For example, students made connections with chunks of words that they recognized, such as *intell* in the word *intellectual*—they thought it "might have something to do with intelligence, being smart"—and *segregated/segregation,* which they decided had something to do with sections and segments, parts of a whole. Some students recalled having heard about Gandhi but could not remember what he was known for. Others recognized *residence* ("where you live"), *inspiring* ("like music that makes you want to do something"), and *assassinated* ("being shot"). As a class, we took on the word *predominantly* and broke it into pieces that students could recognize and understand: the *pre-,* which they understood meant "before." They also understood that to *dominate* means to "overpower or be strong." Putting it all together with a minimum of input from the teacher, the students were able to conclude that *predominantly* meant "something that was done before anything else."

Relating Word Meanings

I incorporated activities for relating word meaning into our readings of several fictional texts that are required in our curriculum. After reading Alana Morris's *Vocabulary Unplugged: 30 Lessons That Will Revolutionize How You Will Teach Vocabulary K–12,* I developed my own activity that I call It's in the Bag and used it with our reading of O. Henry's short story "The Ransom of Red Chief." For the activity, each class was divided into groups and each group skimmed a particular section of the short story for unfamiliar words. The groups then selected the top three words they thought everyone would need to know and understand to fully comprehend the story.

Next, the groups created a working definition for each selected word and found five to seven synonyms for each word. The original word and the synonyms were typed into a chart I provided, and students searched the Internet to find at least four pictures or pieces of clip art that represented their word. To find synonyms and pictures, students employed several cognitive strategies, including activating and using prior knowledge of particular synonyms to make a match with the targeted word, making connections to related words, and visualizing situations, objects, and other symbols to represent the word.

Students printed their pages of words, synonyms, and pictures and then cut the pages apart so that each word or picture was a separate piece. Once each of the groups had completed this task, I took all of the words and pictures from the entire class, mixed them together, and then randomly separated them to place an equal number of words and/or pictures into stations, with one station for each group in the class. At each station, I placed plain brown paper bags, glue, and the words/pictures that the students had created. Each group was assigned a station, where its task was to pick up three bags, find the three original vocabulary words (which had been printed in a larger, distinct font), and glue one vocabulary word near the top of each bag. To keep the focus on metacognitive thinking, I made sure that none of the groups were working with their original vocabulary words. Once each group had

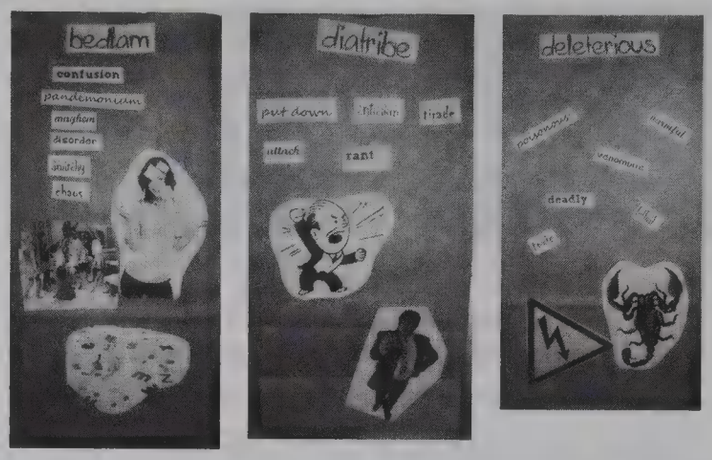
identified and attached to the bag the vocabulary words they would be working with, their task was to determine the meaning of each word, and then find all synonyms and pictures at that same station that matched any of their words, placing those into the corresponding bag. Working together, students had to decide how to find the meanings of their newly selected words by asking each other or using the dictionary; these decisions required metacognitive awareness to complete the task. Furthermore, students had to develop their own idea of what each word meant and what some synonyms might be, which required cognitive efforts to infer appropriate meanings and make connections.

When the groups of students had been given ample time to select the words and pictures from the first station, I asked them to rotate to the next station, where their task was to search for the five to seven synonyms as well as the four or more pictures that illustrated the meanings of each of their words. When the groups found a synonym or picture that they believed matched one of their words, they picked it up and placed it in the corresponding bag. Cognitively, students were engaged in categorizing as well as connecting and drawing conclusions about word meanings.

I was concerned that students from different groups might tell each other which words and pictures to select, based on having been in the group that had selected the word originally, but as it turned out, their competitive nature kept the students from doing this. Even with no real prize being offered, each group was quite serious about "winning." Once they had been through each station, they returned to their original seats and began sharing the words that they had, the synonyms they had found, and the pictures they thought best illustrated their words' meanings.

I gave students some time to go through their bags, placing all of the components on the bags together (but not yet gluing them down!) and discussing whether or not they thought they had everything correct. We then took turns sharing, discussing each bag and figuring out if they did, indeed, have all of the correct pieces. As we worked through this process, students from other groups would say "Oh, I think this word belongs to them" or "Hey, we have a picture that fits that word better than it fits ours." Only after we had completely and

FIGURE 3. Vocabulary Bags from "It's in the Bag"

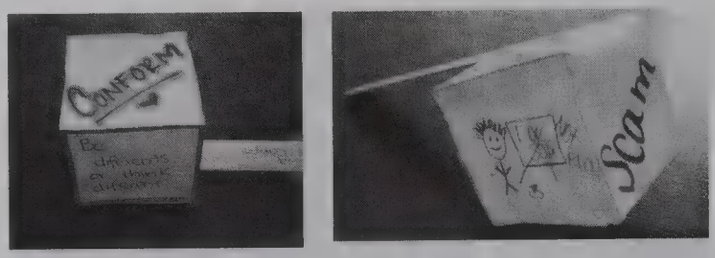


accurately finished matching up all of the words with their correct synonyms and pictures were the groups able to glue everything to the bags. The finished products were stapled onto the wall and we had a final "gallery walk," allowing everyone to see each of the finished word bags. For examples of the students' work, see Figure 3.

While time-consuming, this activity was a raging success with the students due to the high level of engagement with the interactive, hands-on, kinesthetic aspects of the project. They were also entirely serious about finding the correct matching synonyms and pictures for each of their words, illustrating that they took ownership of the words. I discovered that the students naturally referred back to the vocabulary bags when those words came up again in our readings. It was clear that students had a solid understanding of what the "bag words" meant and how each fit into the text. I have also noticed some of the words appearing in student writings since we completed this activity.

We also used another activity for relating word meanings, entitled Vocabulary Cubes, with sections of Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl.* This activity is an adaptation of the Frayer model of concept mapping (see fig. 4). We began this activity by targeting important words and then creating an ongoing list of the words on the board. Whether we were reading aloud as a whole group, silently, or in small groups, anytime students encountered an unfamiliar word, they could add it to the list. If the word was already on the board, students placed a mark next to it to indicate agreement that the word was necessary for comprehending the reading material.

FIGURE 4. Vocabulary Cubes



Next, we determined which words had been selected most frequently as being unfamiliar and important to understanding the text. We discussed possible meanings before students selected a word to research in depth. I provided students with a template for a three-dimensional cube that called for the following information: word (written on two sides), definition, example, picture, and non-example. Once these elements were in place, students decorated the template, cut it out, shaped it into a cube, and then glued it onto a large Popsicle stick. To develop their understanding of the word, students used the dictionary, talked to peers, and looked for ideas on the Internet. I was also moving around the room, spending time with each student, discussing his or her word.

Students were creative and enjoyed the hands-on nature of making the cube, but they also developed an understanding of how to create relationships between words and their meanings, particularly with regard to the examples and non-examples.

Again, this project was successful. Students were creative and enjoyed the hands-on nature of making the cube, but they also developed an understanding of how to create relationships between words and their meanings, particularly with regard to the examples and non-examples. The picture-representation side of the cube was especially beneficial with the English language learners, as they were able to depict a deeper understanding of the word's meaning. I extended this activity by having students hold on to their cubes as we read through the text. Anytime someone's word came up in the reading, that student was asked to hold up the cube. If a peer had a question about what the word meant, we stopped the reading and had a discussion based on the cube. Following the reading, all the cubes were placed on the wall for review.

While progress in vocabulary learning is slow and sometimes not apparent, my students have made some progress in becoming more metacognitive as evidenced by such comments as "some of the words, I kind of already knew them, but I didn't *know* that I knew them," and "you have to slow down and think about it. If you don't know a word and you think it's important, take the time to find out what it means and that helps you reading a lot." Furthermore, I noticed students becoming more engaged in the reading of the text, even getting excited when the words that their group had worked with appeared. I could also see that the students were able to focus more on comprehension as they had already become "experts" with the words that I had chosen specifically as most likely to be unfamiliar to the students. Possibly even more exciting is that a year later, with many of the same students returning to my classroom (as an ESL teacher, I am able to "cycle" with my students, often from grades 9 through 12), I am able to see them continue to employ the metacognitive strategies that I had hoped they would take away from these lessons. My students have become more thoughtful with regard to how they identify and approach words that are unfamiliar to them. As we have continued to work on building these metacognitive skills, I have heard from other teachers who work with my students that they are seeing improved reading comprehension and engagement. I have also noted that my students are performing better on benchmark assessments, leading me to believe that these strategies are helping them to be better comprehenders of what they read.

Final Note

We realize that it takes many meaningful encounters with word meanings in a variety of contexts for students to internalize word knowledge. It is important to build on students' growing understanding of word meanings and to move students toward applying the word meanings in generative ways. Cognitively, students can use these newly acquired word meanings to summarize and synthesize information. Metacognitively, students can begin to ask themselves questions such as, "Is this the appropriate word to use in this context?" or, "Can I use this word in summarizing information about this topic?" Developing students' awareness of how to

think about word meanings will ultimately make them better readers, better word users, and therefore better comprehenders.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Building Vocabulary: Making Multigenre Glossaries Based on Student Inquiry" builds vocabulary and encourages active reading by allowing students to choose vocabulary words from a text that the class reads. To help students absorb and comprehend these new words, they create multigenre glossaries that can then be used as a classroom resource. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/building-vocabulary-making-multigenre-1143.html

Joan Kaywell Receives 2010 CEL Exemplary Leader Award

Joan F. Kaywell is professor of English education at the University of South Florida, where she has won several teaching awards. She is passionate about assisting preservice and practicing teachers in discovering ways to improve literacy. She donates her time extensively to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and its Florida affiliate (FCTE): she is past president of NCTE's Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) and is currently serving as its membership secretary; she is a past president of FCTE twice and is still on its board of directors. Dr. Kaywell is published in several journals; regularly reviews young adult novels for *The ALAN Review,* the *Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy,* and *Signal*; and has edited two series of textbooks—five volumes of *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics* (1993, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2010) and six volumes of *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with {Various} Issues* (Family, 1999; Societal, 1999; Identity, 1999; Health, 2000; End-of-Life, 2000; Abuse, 2004). She is the author of *Adolescents at Risk: A Guide to Fiction and Nonfiction for Young Adults, Parents, and Professionals* (1993). Her first trade book, *Dear Author: Letters of Hope* (Philomel, 2007), is intended to get students to choose reading as a healthy escape from their lives' negative circumstances. Kaywell fervently believes that teachers and authors are often the unsung heroes of children on the brink of self-destruction. By offering books to children to help them momentarily escape the pain of growing up, teachers offer teenagers a constructive way to survive the crisis, find hope, and know that they are not alone.

Challenging Texts

Reading Nation and World: Cultivating Culturally and Critically Reflexive Readers

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[W]e must expand the horizons against which questions of how and what to read and write are both posed and answered.

—*Edward W. Said,* Culture and Imperialism

The growth of media and technology has made the world a much smaller and, at the same time, a much bigger place. Air travel makes possible a meeting in New York City one day followed by another meeting in Melbourne, Australia, or a beach holiday in Pattaya, Thailand, the next. With today's technology, communication is almost instantaneous—at the click of the Enter key on one's computer keyboard or through one's mobile phone. In today's world, travel beyond one's boundary, whether in physical or virtual space, is inevitable. Within America itself, immigration is quickly changing the demographics toward a more racially and ethnically diverse population (Suárez-Orozco). Cross-cultural interaction has become an inevitable fact of life.

In this context, there is a need for educators to rethink the use of multicultural literature in the English language arts (ELA) classroom. The term *multicultural literature* is generally understood to refer to diverse literature from within the United States (Cai; Fang, Fu, and Lamme), focusing particularly on race and gender (e.g., Brooks; Smith; Sutherland), and, more recently, social class (e.g., Beach, Thein, and Parks). Sometimes, the term is used broadly in classroom-based research to include literature from other countries (e.g., Boyd; Dressel), though qualitative distinctions about the kinds of multicultural literature used are seldom made.

In light of increasing diversity within the nation and beyond, I argue that it is important to be more aware about the kinds of multicultural literature used in the ELA classroom, and to include literature attentive to differences *within* and *beyond* one's nation for students to engage in what Arthur N. Applebee terms "culturally relevant conversations" about both nation and world. Applebee reminds us that the curriculum can provide students with points of entry into ongoing conversations about their lives and the world around them. It is by participating in conversations about the world that students gain new knowledge, and through appropriate text choice, we can introduce students to conversations that will help them participate as both national and global citizens.

Keen to explore whether reading a text set in another nation could raise qualitatively different kinds of conversations when compared with reading multicultural literature set within the United States, I set out to observe a ninth-grade ELA class in a rural school in the northeastern part of the United States. The teacher, Claire Dickinson, had just completed a seminar on East Asia and was committed to teaching Ji-Li Jiang's *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution,* set in China during the 1960s and 1970s. How would students in a predominantly white class, most of whom had not stepped out of the United States, respond to the teaching of a culturally unfamiliar text set in another nation? Would teaching a literary text that is set in another nation lead to qualitatively different conversations compared to teaching "multicultural" texts from within the nation?

Examples from research demonstrate that the use of multicultural texts in the ELA classroom

can provide opportunities for different kinds of conversations, provided teachers create spaces for such dialogue to take place. For example, African American girls reading Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* found opportunities to talk about race and gender (Sutherland), and diverse students reading diverse texts in a culturally and racially diverse classroom were able to explore issues about identity and difference (Athanases). I discovered during this study of ninth-grade students reading *Red Scarf Girl* that reading a culturally unfamiliar literary text set in another nation provided opportunities for conversations not just about Others but also for conversations about America and about Self as American.

> **How would students in a predominantly white class, most of whom had not stepped out of the United States, respond to the teaching of a culturally unfamiliar text set in another nation? Would teaching a literary text that is set in another nation lead to qualitatively different conversations compared to teaching "multicultural" texts from within the nation?**

An Illustration: The Four Olds

A unit titled The Four Olds designed by Claire best illustrates how conversations about the nation and what it means to be American arose in studying *Red Scarf Girl.* In the memoir, The Four Olds represented "old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits" (Jiang 21) that had to be destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution. Adapting the concept of The Four Olds, Claire got students to pose as aliens sent to Earth to learn the habits and traditions of Americans. Next, as aliens unfamiliar with American culture, the students had to decide which aspects of American life had to be destroyed so that they could take over the country. Finally, toward the end of the assignment, students had to produce a written reflection on what the term *cultural awareness* meant.

During the class brainstorming sessions on the first day, students generated observations about Americans and their lifestyle, concepts that the students normally took for granted. The list, which they shared with the class on the second day, consisted of artifacts, habits, and beliefs, such as *chewing gum, smoking, drugs, cracking fingers, talking back, taking showers, different dress styles, football is big, money is valued.* On the third day, students discussed what others might find unusual about American culture.

The following extract from the classroom discussion on the third day illustrates how the students began to distance themselves from the familiar to think about their taken-for-granted constructs about being American.

Teacher: What are we destroying in our Four Olds?

Students: Smoking, schools.

Student: Flag.

Student: Video games.

Teacher: Why would we have to throw away video games?

Student: 'Cause they're fun.

Student: Television.

Teacher: You'd hate my home. I have an old TV.

[The students list a few other items.]

Students: Taxes, poverty, government.

Teacher: We'd have to get rid of the current system of government then.

Student: Phones.

Students: No!

Student: Sickness and disease?

Student: How do you get rid of that?

Teacher: Is sickness and disease an old habit or way of thinking? [Writes and then cancels disease.]

Student: They might take away women's rights.

Students: Human rights, the White House.

Student: Statue of Liberty, the Pentagon.

Teacher: Things that represent everything American. They will have to go or be reworked.

As the above discussion shows, the conversation started off by examining things that the students decided represented America. The discussion eventually progressed from the above discussion to a discussion about differences between diverse groups and cultures within the United States. Later in the conversation, students noted differences between people living on the East and West coasts, among different socioeconomic groups as well as different cultural

and ethnic groups. The discussion led them to realize that "being American" may mean different things to different people. In their final reflections on "cultural awareness," the students showed that they were beginning to grasp the concept that what was familiar culture to them might not be familiar to others. They were able to articulate that the notion of "cultural awareness" included recognizing that their culture was but one of many cultures within and beyond the nation, and that an attitude of openness was required to understand differences among people.

Written reflections by the students showed that some students became more conscious of their identity as Americans following the study of *Red Scarf Girl*.

Another Illustration: Written Reflections

Written reflections by the students showed that some students became more conscious of their identity as Americans following the study of *Red Scarf Girl.* In the following written reflection, one of the students reflects on the new knowledge learned and reaffirms her identity as an American. Lyn writes:

> Before I read *Red Scarf Girl* I had no idea about the Cultural Revolution or anything that went on in China. In fact, I didn't even know that China was Communist, and I had never heard of Mao Ze-dong. But, after reading *Red Scarf Girl* I actually learned more than I thought I would. I learned all about the Cultural Revolution and how Mao Ze-dong manipulated all the young people to follow his ways. . . . Even though adults and older people say they were for the Cultural Revolution, I don't think they believe they really were. If they did agree I think it is because they feared their lives. . . . After reading *Red Scarf Girl,* I realized how hard the Cultural Revolution really was for people and it made me realize how much I would never want this to happen in the United States. I'm glad we got to read this book because I actually liked it. I got to know more about a time in China then I thought I ever would. I really liked this book and I hope we read more books like this in the future.

Through the study of *Red Scarf Girl,* Lyn becomes more aware of one aspect of the history of China as seen through the eyes of the protagonist. In addition, Lyn is able to reflect on the nature of the Cultural Revolution and expresses her desire for such an event not to happen within her country.

Although some students, like Lyn, understood the cultural-historical specificity of Jiang's experience during the Cultural Revolution, not all students understood that. The following reflection illustrates the tendency of students to read a literary text, particularly a memoir, for facts. Kate writes:

> I learned a lot by reading this book. One thing is that I realized how easy it can be for other cultures to be brainwashed by their leaders and how it could happen in our society. I learned that the Chinese culture values many different things compared to us. They think that having a bathroom is amazing and very few people have them. They also live in a one-room house. That actually sounds pretty neat considering we don't have many of those types of houses in our culture. Before I read the book I didn't realize how much a culture would have to destroy the Four Olds. They also have a different school system. They get chosen to go to a high school, like our colleges. So most of the stuff I learned was about how their culture differs from the American culture.

Kate's reflection shows the tendency to take the book at face value without questioning the author's perspective or the multiple perspectives that may arise from a single event. She assumes a static view of culture even though the memoir is set during the Cultural Revolution, and she seems to think that Chinese culture is the same today as it was then. She learns that Chinese culture is different from American culture, but it is a superficial view that rests on binaries between East and West, Them and Us.

Thus, the study of a "multicultural" literary text in itself does not necessarily lead to critical ways of reading. In fact, it may encourage further stereotyping as students bring their attitudes to the understanding of a culturally foreign text. As Sammy, another student, shared with me during an interview, "I don't think we read it differently if it's from another place. We're just reading it."

Cultivating Culturally and Critically Reflexive Readers

The study of *Red Scarf Girl* was initially meant as a way for students to learn about another culture in another nation, but eventually it also became a way for students to distance themselves from Ameri-

can culture to examine their own culture from an outsider's perspective. By making explicit discussion about culture and turning the students' vision inward, Claire provided a forum for students to think about the notion of culture, both familiar and foreign. This need to understand the notion of culture as a construct is essential in a fast-globalizing world where dealing with difference is the norm rather than the exception. Learning to be culturally aware requires understanding that stories are written from culturally diverse viewpoints and that readers read with their own cultural assumptions.

Learning to read with awareness of culture requires deliberate teaching. In a study of the writing that 123 eighth-grade students produced during a multicultural unit, Janice Hartwick Dressel found that the majority of the students did not necessarily explore differences but read the diverse texts with ingrained assumptions. Dressel suggests that teachers should work to develop not just multicultural units but a "critical literacy curriculum" (762) where the emphasis is on critical reading practices. To read from a critical literacy perspective involves not just aesthetic involvement or identification with the text but some sort of critical distancing where students are aware of the text as a construct and of their position as readers with their own social history and assumptions (Lewis). As critical readers, students understand that different worldviews and cultural assumptions are embedded in stories told. Moreover, as reflexive readers, they are able to question their position as readers situated in a particular time, place, and culture and to use the reading experience to reflect on their understandings of themselves and the world around them.

Cultivating culturally and critically reflexive readers thus requires deliberate effort on the part of educators to choose texts that allow for culturally relevant conversations to take place, and to implement instructional strategies to help students read these texts critically. In terms of text choice, we need to be aware that qualitatively different conversations arise from the use of different kinds of multicultural literature in the classroom, and to intentionally choose literary texts that allow for conversations about diversity both within and beyond the nation. The aim is not so much to expose students to an inexhaustible list of literary texts from a variety of places but rather to pay conscious attention to choosing diverse texts that will facilitate culturally relevant conversations about nation and world.

One way of selecting and organizing literary texts is the notion of "paired texts" (Coltrane 28). A literary text from America and another from a different part of the world, linked by similar themes and concerns, can be taught together. For example, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* about persecution of Communists in America is an excellent literary text for studying alongside *Red Scarf Girl,* which is written from the perspective of a Chinese girl who lived through the Cultural Revolution. Brad Coltrane suggests that such pairings will allow for students to identify common themes in literature from America and other parts of the world. However, a critical reading requires more than aesthetic appreciation and identification of universal themes. Students should also learn to read with an awareness that differing cultures and worldviews are embedded in literary texts, and to understand that making meaning of texts is socially situated.

[W]e need to be aware that qualitatively different conversations arise from the use of different kinds of multicultural literature in the classroom, and to intentionally choose literary texts that allow for conversations about diversity both within and beyond the nation.

In terms of instructional strategies, methods that encourage critical distancing rather than mere aesthetic involvement may provide opportunities for students to learn to critically appraise a literary text. Whether the story is set in America or beyond, students can be encouraged to pay attention to how the text is produced and to the assumptions they bring as readers to the text. As the study of *Red Scarf Girl* illustrates, studying a culturally unfamiliar text may be used as a starting point for distancing oneself from one's own culture to understand the notion of culture and how it affects the way we view the world.

In our complicated world of mass migrations and mass media, cross-cultural interaction with others in one's nation and with other nationalities is inevitable. One is no longer just a national citizen but also a global citizen, for which understanding complexity and diversity is a necessary part of everyday living. As educators, we can

help to prepare students by engaging them in conversations about nation and world that will help them read nation and world.

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2011 Call for CEL Award for Exemplary Leadership

This award is given annually to an NCTE member who is an outstanding English language arts educator and leader. Please nominate an exceptional leader who has had an impact on the profession through one or more of the following: (1) work that has focused on exceptional teaching and/or leadership practices (e.g., building an effective department, grade level, or building team; developing curricula or processes for practicing English language arts educators; or mentoring); (2) contributions to the profession through involvement at both the local and national levels; (3) publications that have had a major impact.

Your award nominee submission must include a nomination letter, the nominee's curriculum vitae, and no more than three additional letters of support from various colleagues. Send by **February 1, 2011**, to: Patrick Monahan, 4685 Lakeview Dr., Interlochen, MI 49643; pjmonahan1@gmail.com (Subject: CEL Exemplary Leader).

Innovative Writing Instruction

Reducing Vocabulary to Increase Vocabulary: Student-Centered Vocabulary Instruction for Writing That Makes a Difference

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Many people, particularly teachers and students, associate vocabulary instruction with long lists of ambiguous words, copying the definitions from the dictionary by rote, completing accompanying analogies, or matching the words with their meanings and taking a quiz at the end of the week. This approach to vocabulary instruction is typical to many classrooms but, unfortunately, it does not account for the various learning styles or abilities of students. Like many other teachers, I have limited students' potential by using only these traditional forms of vocabulary instruction.

Recently and finally, I acknowledged my misguided instructional approach and was ready to overcome what I had been ignoring for quite some time: that (1) the students hated the day I introduced new vocabulary and (2) the students weren't using our new words in their written compositions or in their daily life conversations once they completed the vocabulary tests at the end of the week.

My mentor suggested that I try a more practical approach, one that involves providing students with fewer, more applicable words. This idea seems simple, yet it breaks all the rules of standardized, traditional vocabulary instruction in which more words are better. How could something so simple be a rigorous enough approach? How can I ensure the students will be engaged? After working through some responses to these questions, and truly desperate for a breakthrough, I decided to try it. What developed is a useful approach to teaching vocabulary that I am happy to recommend to other teachers.

Accepting the Unacceptable

To accept the idea of administering fewer words to students, I first questioned the overall purpose behind teaching vocabulary. Undoubtedly, I wanted my students to increase their facility with complex words in their academic essays. Demonstration that masquerades as regurgitation was not my goal. Students needed to be able to understand the parts of speech and the shades of word meaning to effectively use them in their essays. Assigning students 10 to 15 words each week made it difficult for the students to retain and apply the new words; therefore, I decided three words per week would be a manageable number, and I chose words for their usability in a persuasive essay, which is the curriculum focus in junior English in the state of Tennessee. This strategy can easily be adapted for any mode of writing.

Vocabulary Mondays

Research shows that students are more able to retain and implement new vocabulary if they can make connections to their backgrounds and experiences (Ellis). Self-discovery is another significant component for engaging students in learning. Considering these key factors, I knew that just changing my vocabulary instruction by reducing the number of words per week would not adequately produce the type of results I ultimately wanted: increased student engagement with a variety of terms

I wanted my students to increase their facility with complex words in their academic essays. Demonstration that masquerades as regurgitation was not my goal.

and student essays and conversations that effectively employed words from their growing vocabulary. To provide a sense of structure, I implemented "Vocabulary Mondays." Each Monday, students entered the room expecting a new set of words. I would select three words per week, all the same part of speech, and each week I would choose a different part of speech.

Gerri Hixenbaugh asserts, "Learning a word is not an 'all or nothing' kind of thing. It is more like a dimmer switch that gradually produces a greater supply of light." Learners can move from not knowing a word to eventually learning the meanings and then enhancing their understandings of words through repeated exposure, study, and analysis. To begin this student-centered learning process, I used several strategies and provided various opportunities for exposure to different words. First, I showed students the words and provided them with the part of speech. Then it became their job, along with their vocabulary partner, to "discover" the words' meanings. The discovery process of this task required students to use a dictionary or thesaurus to determine the definitions. When the word might have more than one meaning, we read them all as a class, and I helped the students to determine the meaning that would best suit their writing purposes and contexts. Sometimes if the word had multiple meanings, I would contextualize the word by placing it in a sentence or sharing with them a story with the word in it. In these ways, students were able to think through, choose, and apply the most appropriate meaning of the words from their dictionary search. Importantly, students were encouraged to phrase the definitions in their own words as they recorded them in their vocabulary notebooks.

However, the students' job does not end with writing the definitions. To employ self-discovery and to provide students with a means of making connections, I assign an additional mini-activity. The purpose of the mini-activity is for students to demonstrate their understanding of the word. Each week, the mini-activity is the same for all students. Sometimes I draw the activity out of a hat, while other times I invite students to choose the activity or suggest new ones. These mini-activities include making a poem using all three words, writing a story, drawing a picture, making a collage, acting out the words, writing a song, etc. After students have used half of a 55-minute class period to decipher the word meanings and to complete the activity, we have "pair share" time. Students are usually proud to share their skits, raps, pictures, or collages as they demonstrate their understandings of new vocabulary.

When students' brains are actively engaged in discussing, discovering, and demonstrating, then the words and their representative meanings become more permanent, visible, and understandable.

These types of activities also provide teachable moments outside vocabulary instruction. For example, in demonstrating the word *detrimental* as a skit, one group of students planned an act about the detrimental effects of drunk driving. After they finished, the class engaged in a lively, informative conversation in which we shared worries, warnings, and advice. In fact, one student willingly shared that a drunk driver had hit her brother. He survived, she shared, but her poignant message and personal connection grounded the meaning of *detrimental* not only for her but also for all the students in the room. The conversation even branched out to a discussion of other distractions while driving such as eating, texting, or fatigue, all of which could cause *detrimentally* distracting effects behind the wheel.

As we end this portion of Vocabulary Mondays, the students and I review the meanings of the new words to ensure full understanding, and we discuss examples of how the words might be used in persuasive essays. We also analyze whether the words could be used to support or refute a specific topic. When students' brains are actively engaged in discussing, discovering, and demonstrating, then the words and their representative meanings become more permanent, visible, and understandable.

Creating Vocabulary Notebooks

Once students have finished the processes of discovery and demonstration with their vocabulary partners, they complete an individual assignment for the remainder of the period. Students keep a vocabulary notebook of all the words that we cover. Vocabulary notebooks are simply a one-subject spiral notebook or its equivalent that is used only for vocabulary.

Students are required to furnish their own notebook, but I keep a supply for students who are unable to purchase one.

The main purpose of the vocabulary notebook is for students to use them as personalized dictionaries for writing assignments. I require students to have several elements for each word in their vocabulary notebooks, including the definition, part of speech, other forms of the words, a couple of synonyms, and two original sentences. All the students use the same layout when making vocabulary notebook entries, which makes the grading faster and easier for me. It also makes the notebooks easier for students to use while they are writing. Eventually, using the words becomes second nature to students, and gradually they do not have to rely on the notebooks as much.

Measuring Student Achievement

One specific measure of achievement is revealed in students' writing and conversation. I always have a few students who awkwardly attempt to use the assigned vocabulary words in class for comic relief or dramatic effect, intentionally mispronouncing words for humor or making funny, alternate meanings. Eventually, though, the words begin to find their way into student writings, and the students became increasingly comfortable applying them appropriately because they understood the meanings of the words. Also, the words are more applicable for students because they are selected with purpose: to increase vocabulary and enhance student writing. Seeing my students attempting to incorporate "new" words into their conversation and reading them in their essays is gratification for me. Typically, students are taught to expect a numerical reward for their accomplishments. Therefore, I rely on an efficient method to monitor students' vocabulary notebooks and prepare students for their regular tests.

Each vocabulary unit contains four groups of three words. So, in a month's time, students learn twelve words. Because daily and weekly schedules are never predictable, more than one month may pass before the notebooks are collected; however, I only collect the notebooks after we have completed four sets of three words. This strategy provides teachers with flexibility in instruction and grading.

At the end of four sets of three words, I collect the notebooks to be graded for completion, validity, and correct usage of the words in the sentences. Because each page is constructed the same way (I set up the layout for them originally), I only have to flip through four pages per student about once every month. (For the assignment I distribute to students and an example from a real student, see Figure 1.) Each page represents one group of words, and four pages consist of one unit. It usually takes a few minutes per notebook because I carefully monitored their work in class each week. Additionally, I give a fill-in-the-blank quiz for the twelve words when I collect the notebooks. Since students have been using the words in their sentences all along, the quiz does not provoke anxiety, but it does demonstrate in a traditional manner that students are learning the vocabulary from our class.

Quality over Quantity

Once I explained that I had a different plan to teach vocabulary—that I would only assign three words per week—my students quickly embraced this new instructional approach. In fact, they were immediately relieved of the burden that comes with memorizing a long list of words every week. I do not think the students initially realized that my strategy would be more rigorous and would require more "brain power" than what they had been accustomed to in vocabulary instruction. However, they enjoyed figuring out the meanings of words and looked forward to the weekly Vocabulary Monday activity.

My new strategy for vocabulary instruction works well for regular education students, honors education students, and special education students because they are all able to achieve within their abilities and work at their own pace. While some of the honors-level students wrote elaborate stories with twisted plot lines, the students with learning disabilities wrote funny or personal stories of which they were equally proud. Everyone works on the same material, but, by its nature, the instruc-

My new strategy for vocabulary instruction works well for regular education students, honors education students, and special education students because they are all able to achieve within their abilities and work at their own pace.

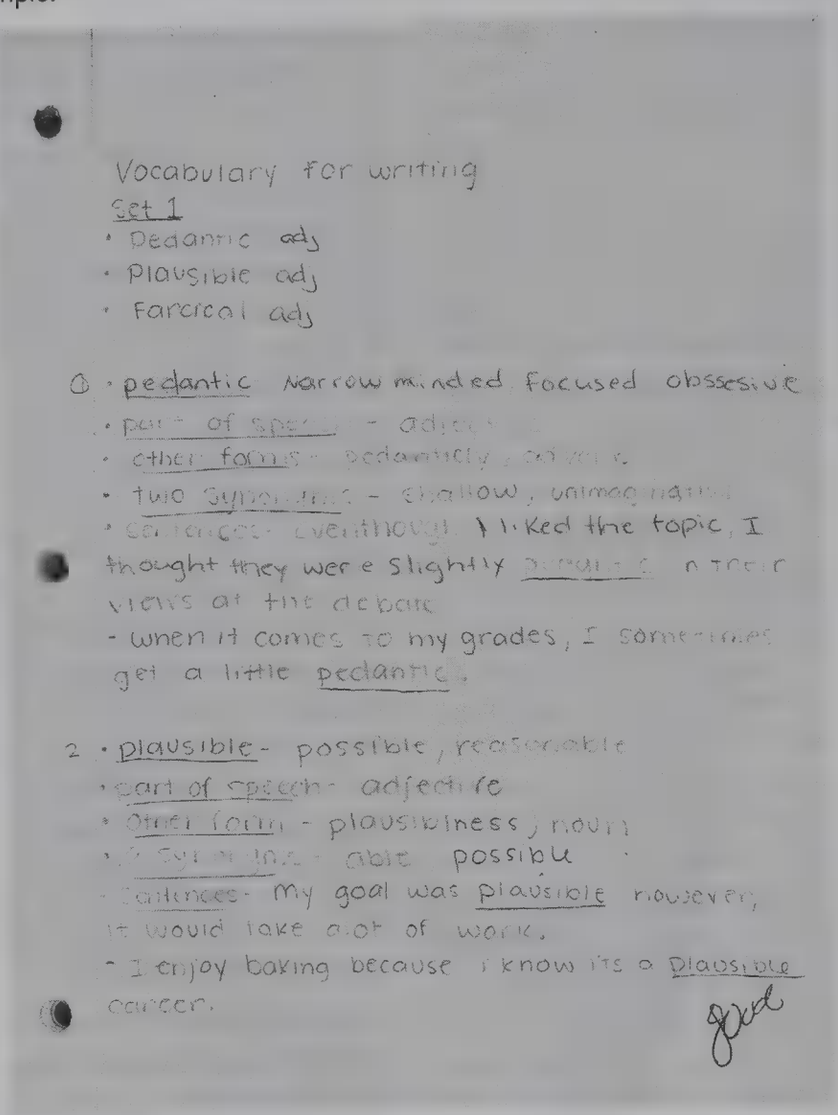
FIGURE 1. Vocabulary for Writing: Vocabulary Notebook Layout

Directions: Each word must have the following components in your notebook.

- The word
- The definition
- Part of speech
- Other forms of the word (other parts of speech)
- Two synonyms
- Two original sentences

**Please label each item on your page and make sure to *underline* the words in your sentences.

Example:


Vocabulary for writing
Set 1
• Pedantic adj
• Plausible adj
• Farcical adj

1 • pedantic Narrow minded focused obssesive
• part of speech - adjective
• other forms - pedantically, adverb
• two synonyms - shallow, unimaginative
• sentences - Eventhough I liked the topic, I thought they were slightly pedantic in their views at the debate
- when it comes to my grades, I sometimes get a little pedantic.

2 • plausible - possible, reasonable
• part of speech - adjective
• other form - plausibiness, noun
• 2 synonyms - able possible
- sentences - My goal was plausible however, it would take a lot of work.
- I enjoy baking because I know its a plausible career.

good

tion is differentiated for all students. Furthermore, because the words had been chosen with a specific utility in mind, all the students are able to creatively incorporate the words in their compositions.

So, can reducing vocabulary increase vocabulary? Compared to my previous experiences with student writing, this strategy works. After several Vocabulary Mondays and using Vocabulary Notebooks, students' essays became alive with vivid verbs, engaging transition words, and colorful adjectives. Providing students with opportunities to take charge of their own learning and helping them to make accomplishments in writing have shown me that stepping across and beyond traditional boundaries of vocabulary instruction has made all the difference.

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Mentoring Matters

When I once served on a jury in Federal Court, the attorneys on both sides of the case took special care to thank the members of the jury for their service. Perhaps knowing that for some jury members service meant at minimum an inconvenience and in some cases a hardship, the attorneys wanted the jury to know that someone appreciated their sacrifice. The introductory remarks on both sides were similar and somewhere along these lines: "Your service here today is an essential part of a democratic society. As jury members you are the backbone of the American jurisprudence system." It seemed at the time that this was a bit of pandering to cultivate a positive rapport and win favor for their competing perspectives on the case. But now I find myself making similar remarks to every cooperating teacher I meet. I tell cooperating teachers that their work with prospective teachers is vital, that I appreciate the sacrifice they make by devoting their time and attention to the development of new professionals, and that the teacher education program cannot function properly without their contributions.

Melissa A. McClain reveals in greater detail the enormous impact—positive or negative—that mentor teachers make on the development of emerging professionals. Being a good mentor teacher requires more than a willingness to allow someone else to teach your classes, and it demands a careful balance between providing critical guidance and allowing autonomy. The role of mentor teachers is crucial, and the need for good ones is acute.

Wanted: Mentors for Future English Teachers

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Students in our Secondary English Education program consider their field experiences the most valuable part of their path toward becoming English teachers. During these experiences, they come to recognize the difference between crafting a lesson on paper and actually executing their plans. Describing her first time teaching a lesson, one student reflected, "These experiences with real, three-dimensional, teenaged students was very grounding and helped center my ideas; actually being in a high school was wonderfully vivid and tangible and made everything real."

This all seems logical to me. As an English teacher educator, I believe that nothing I do in the college classroom can ever match the practical experience that preservice English teachers receive by working with secondary teachers and students. From introductory field experiences to the student teaching semester, working in classrooms is where it all becomes "real," where pedagogy becomes practice. Researching teacher education programs, Arthur Levine, former president of Teachers College at Columbia University, reports on the importance of these classroom experiences in teacher education programs. Of 1,206 colleges and universities offering such programs, he named only four as model schools excelling in

> **[N]othing I do in the college classroom can ever match the practical experience that preservice English teachers receive by working with secondary teachers and students.**

their efforts at training teachers (6). One of the common denominators among these superior programs is their frequent and extended field experiences. Levine claims that, nationwide, teacher education programs vary drastically in the number of hours of practical experience they require—

from an abysmal 30 hours to 300 hours—over students' matriculation through these programs (5).

Levine's findings and our own critical look at our field experience offerings—including the feedback from students—prompted my colleagues and me to add another field experience to our program. This change has us thinking a lot about field experiences and the lasting effects they leave on our students. If we hope to maximize the learning that occurs in these experiences, we also need to address another critical piece in this process: we need a network of like-minded teachers to mentor students through these field experiences.

The Search for Good Mentor Teachers

Putting together a reliable network of mentor teachers is our newest goal. Though our university is part of a partnership with numerous districts in our area, those of us who work specifically in English education would like to develop more familiar connections with teachers, as opposed to those mentors we rarely have the opportunity to meet who are paired with our students through our School of Education. (My colleagues and I are housed in the English department.) In my three years here, I've heard mixed reviews about mentor teachers and, through observing student teachers, I've seen both truly dedicated ones and ones who seem to find the extra work of mentoring a nuisance. This delicate relationship between a mentor and a preservice teacher can make or break a beginning teacher's self-image. Having been on both sides of this partnership, I know it's important enough to dedicate time to ensuring that both our students and our mentors have a positive experience. No teacher wants to get stuck with an incompetent or lazy student, and no student wants to work with an unwelcoming or rigid mentor. In the best scenarios, however, what a joy it is to hear students rave about what they learned by working with inspired and supportive mentor teachers.

To harness this positive vibe, my colleagues and I have begun to compile an A-list of those outstanding mentors with whom our students have enjoyed working. I've written to these teachers to thank them for their mentorship and modeling, and to pass along the message that they've had a positive impact on our students. I've also stooped to groveling, in hopes that these teachers would want to welcome our students into their classrooms in the future. They are the vital, yet somewhat invisible, link to the successful training of teachers. Our program relies on them.

Making the A-list

During the process of forming this A-list, I've spent considerable time trying to identify what it is about these mentors that makes them desirable. From this highly informal research, I've gleaned that our student teachers most satisfied with their student teaching experience found that their mentors were genuinely willing to invest time in their development as teachers, which often meant that their mentors had given up just enough control and allowed just enough room for error, so that student teachers could realize and grow from their own missteps. These mentors were generous with their time and support. Most important, perhaps, they offered constructive feedback that encouraged student teachers toward improvement, while remaining positive and upbeat. Student teachers react strongly to negativity and can lose their confidence easily. This is not to say they should be coddled but, similar to young writers who respond more favorably to positive comments about their writing (Spandel 363), so too do novice teachers need encouragement to continue. This is one trait of mentors that stands out: they must be invested in the success of the student teacher and stay with him or her through the uphill climb of the learning curve.

No teacher wants to get stuck with an incompetent or lazy student, and no student wants to work with an unwelcoming or rigid mentor. In the best scenarios, however, what a joy it is to hear students rave about what they learned by working with inspired and supportive mentor teachers.

Sadly, in the last year, I've seen several good student teachers have their morale shaken by "bad" mentors who did more damage than good. Our student teachers who have had these negative experiences described these mentors as overly controlling and inflexible, uncommunicative about expectations or feedback, and generally disapproving. In fact, these student teachers (two had negative

experiences of the eleven student teachers from last semester) said that they would have quit and abandoned their career goal had they not found a supportive surrogate: the university supervisor/faculty, another teacher at the school, or even the students, who offered enough positive feedback to keep them coming back each day. I've seen these situations first-hand and, in my judgment, excellent mentors can leave their egos out of the equation; they are not insecure in their own pedagogical abilities and want to lift up new teachers, not push them down. Their own practices are enhanced by new energy in the classroom. Both experienced and novice teachers benefit from such a partnership.

You can see that compiling this list is not an easy task. I wanted to share this "want ad" of sorts with the readers of *English Journal* so I could grovel to would-be mentors on a more public level. I address them frankly here and say: "We need you!"

A Call for Good Mentor Teachers

If you are reading *English Journal,* you are one of those secondary teachers who seek to improve your practice and stay informed about new challenges and innovations in our field. This is exactly the kind of English teacher we need. Teachers-in-training need to see you in action. You are the integral part of every teacher preparation program.

Let me break this plea into two parts. First, English education students need your expertise in English language arts pedagogy. In methods courses, our students learn about student-centered classrooms, multimodal teaching, the integration of media and technology, adolescent literature, and concepts that reflect literacy learning in the 21st century. However, many students find themselves feeling defeated and suspect about their futures because of the incongruence between the classrooms they imagine possible and the classrooms they actually see in their fieldwork. We can read the works of notable researchers and educators in our field, but unless our students see the theories and strategies in action, good ideas remain theoretical. We seek secondary teachers who can show them a kind of teaching practice that is responsive to the professional demands of our times.

Second, our students need your encouragement and personal mentorship—about everything from engaging reluctant learners to managing the paper load. They want to see how an experienced teacher handles the myriad responsibilities of the job. They need someone to let them take some risks, learn from mistakes, and grow from your constructive feedback as they work to improve their nascent skills. They need a sympathetic and experienced guide to support their emerging "teacher self." We all needed that at some point in our training.

Building a Network of Mentor Teachers

I know the kind of teachers I describe here are out there—lots of you. We've seen your kind at my own institution. But, we need to keep building this network—everywhere—so we don't burn out those mentors we call on repeatedly. We also hope to expand the diverse settings where we can place our students so that they can work with teenagers from various environments. We understand the extra work involved in guiding a new teacher and, sadly, shrinking budgets leave us little, if anything, to offer you in exchange for your time and effort. It is simply out of kindness and a love for teaching that you do what you do for our students.

So, if you feel you have time to give back to the profession by welcoming a teacher-in-training to your classroom, please do by contacting your nearest teacher education program. I can't emphasize enough how powerful your role can be in the growth of a beginning teacher. I hope you take me up on this offer and find that helping someone else find joy in the teaching life rekindles your own.

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Melissa McClain is assistant professor of English and coordinates the Secondary English Education program at Southern Connecticut State University. She also teaches a methods course in teaching adolescent literature and observes student teachers, who are hopefully paired with encouraging mentors.

Off the Shelves

Robert B. Parker Tackles the Adolescent Detective Novel

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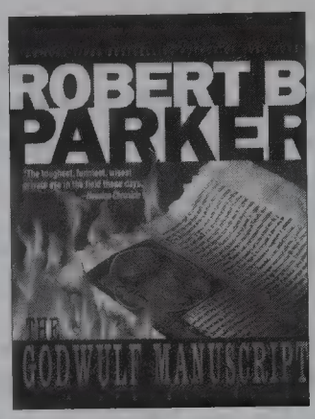
Robert B. Parker is not the first or the last author to write successfully for adult audiences and then market a novel to young adults. James Patterson, Carl Hiaasen, Ridley Pearson, Sherman Alexie, Michael Chabon, and Joyce Carol Oates quickly jump to mind. Even with large readerships, Parker's, Patterson's, Pearson's, and Hiaasen's novels probably won't be used on the AP literature exam. In 2006, Patterson spoke to the NCTE general assembly. I went and I wasn't alone. The early meeting was well attended; English teachers love when successful writers explain that we do the hard work, that we encourage readers who are often reluctant. Patterson shared his joy of reading and passion for writing, for telling the story.

Why do successful writers for adults turn to writing for adolescents? Do Parker and others understand marketing and plan to capture future readers during their formative stages? Alexie, Chabon, and especially Oates have well-established literary reputations and notable awards to their credits. How will writing young adult literature advance their literary reputations? Perhaps, they just like people to read what they write and adolescents have proven to be an extremely loyal fan base—if you manage to get their attention.

Which books students read and why they read them is a mystery to most of us who teach adolescents. Who could have predicted the unprecedented success of the Harry Potter and, more recently, the Twilight Saga and the Percy Jackson series? If witches and wizards followed by vampires, werewolves, and Olympian demigods can grab and hold the attention of young readers, why can't the tried-and-true detective?

Parker's Vision of the Modern Detective Novel

While many authors mentioned above write detective fiction, for my taste, Parker translates the genre best to the adolescent audience. He is an English teacher's dream. Not only does his writing pay homage to the detective genre, he smoothly alludes to classical references and defines the hero's quest while both building and rejecting stereotypes. Parker's first detective novel, *The Godwulf Manuscript* (Houghton, 1974), is older than the Internet. His larger-than-



life private detective, Spenser, seems lost in time as he parades around Boston righting wrongs and defending the helpless. Spenser is a cross between Raymond Chandler's Phillip Marlowe and Sir Edmund Spenser's Artegal, a comparison that is not accidental. Parker holds a PhD in English, and his dissertation explores the detective fiction of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Ross McDonald. Parker's iconic detective is named for Sir Edmund Spenser, the renaissance poet who chronicled valiant deeds of medieval knights.

Parker creates plot-driven detective novels sprinkled with ironic dialogue. His good guys are good and his bad guys are bad. Discerning between the two is not always easy. For example, Spenser's closest ally is Hawk, an African American gunman with an unclear, but criminal, past. His other close associates are Belson, a white

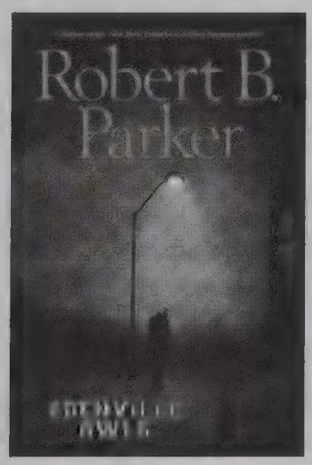
police officer, and his lady in waiting, Susan Silverman, a Harvard-trained psychiatrist. All three are inexplicably drawn to Spenser's sense of right or wrong—regardless of their individual worldview. Often, the rule of law has little to do with Spenser's personal moral code. Like Marlowe and Artegal, Spenser's pursuit of justice in defense of truth, duty, friends, and the abused is more important than the law.

October 2009 marked 25 years of Spenser, who has now appeared in 37 novels. Parker's earliest Spenser novels are truer to the hard-boiled tradition. Now, he has drawn closer to both Susan and Hawk. In addition, throughout the series Spenser recruits a number of tough assistants that come and go as the plots dictate. They serve as a commentary on American diversity and include a Native American; a Mexican American; a gay, southern tough guy; and the expected Italian gunman. It doesn't matter where you come from or what you look like, if your heart is true; if you measure up to Spenser's code, you qualify for the quest. Although unspoken, Spenser recognizes the code almost immediately in others. At some point in every novel, Susan's mild, but persistent, probing into the nature of the man she loves serves to underscore the difficulty of naming the hero's qualities beyond his determined loyalty to those he protects.

In recent years, Parker introduced three adolescent novels, *The Edenville Owls, The Boxer and the Spy,* and *Chasing the Bear: A Young Spenser Novel.* All three novels continue Parker's quick-paced prose and strong independent characters that his readers expect to find. Typical to the moves of successful adult novelists who write for younger audiences, the language and sexual situations are all but gone. What remains dominant is protagonists' double quest: to solve the mystery at hand and to define a moral code of action that will guide their lives as adults.

The Noir Detective Meets the Adolescent Investigator: *The Edenville Owls* (Philomel, 2007)

Parker's first adolescent novel is also a journey into the noir atmosphere of early American detective fiction. Set in the 1940s of post–World War II small-town America, one might wonder how much trouble a team of junior high school basketball players can find. Who is Miss Delaney, the beautiful new English teacher, and why does a mysterious man bother her? Driven by curiosity, Bobby Murphy and his friends watch out for Miss Delaney. There are too many unexplained pasts among the returning veterans: who was or wasn't a war hero? Bobby learns that war takes its toll at home as well as on the battlefield.

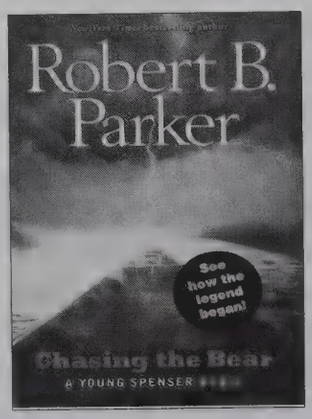


Boxing and the Art of Self-Control: *The Boxer and the Spy* (Philomel, 2008)

This time, Parker creates an adolescent character reminiscent of Spenser. The main character, Terry Novack, can't let rest the unexplained death of a shy schoolmate. He picks at the edges of the mystery. As people warn him away, Terry decides that knowing the truth is worth the fight. Parker's stylized and ironic dialogue, action-driven plots, and constant musing on the nature of good and evil continue in this YA novel. A corrupt principal, a femme fatale, and steroid-driven bullies attempt to manipulate the lives of students for economic and political gain in the small beach town of Cabot. Terry unravels the fabric of deceit in his community as he strives to control his own passions and temptations, developing his own system of values.

Literary Allusions: *Chasing the Bear: A Young Spenser Novel* (Philomel, 2009)

In *Chasing the Bear,* Parker introduces readers to Spenser as an adolescent. Readers who know the adult Spenser expect the detective's sarcastic rebuttals in the face of brutes and bullies. Yet, the young Spenser is a patient and quiet adolescent. Spenser's upbringing by his father and two maternal uncles is frequently alluded to in the adult series but never developed. Here, Parker enables readers to see how the young Spenser learns by watching the steady example of his nearly mythic relatives. He learns to act and accept responsibility as an adult, and he intuits that doing



for others is often more important than words alone.

Chasing the Bear describes an episode from Spenser's youth establishing him as a modern-day knight-errant for the abused and mistreated. In this frame narration, the adult Spenser tells Susan, in a series of long flashbacks, how his family's values guided him as he saved a friend from an abusive father and confronted bigotry by protecting a young Mexican boy. The novel is a sure hit for hunting and boxing fans or for anyone wondering what it means to stand bravely against injustice.

Parker indirectly sponsors education, literacy, and literature through young Spenser's relationship with his father and uncles. The adult Spenser explains to Susan that while teaching him to be an honorable man, they read to him.

> None of them had any idea what was considered appropriate for a little kid. They just took turns plowing on through the classics of Western literature in half-hour chunks every night. I didn't understand most of it, and I was bored with a lot of it. But I loved my father and my uncles, and I liked getting their full attention. (13)

Through the course of the novel Malory, Tennyson, Dickens, Faulkner, and Stout are all referenced. Parker spends very little time developing the important influences of his literary allusions; maybe that is a role we can play as teachers.

As I mentioned earlier, Patterson suggests that teachers do the hard work. We not only provide books for adolescents, we influence how they feel about reading, how they might think about a book, and, in some measure, which books they might read later. I was always a reader, but not a directed reader. In retrospect, I think my teachers were thrilled that I read, and as long as I was reading, they generally left me alone. I don't regret the books I found on my own; I enjoyed them. What I regret are the books I could have read or might have read earlier—with a little guidance. I found many books just because authors like Parker or, even earlier, Louis L'Amour referenced them in passing. L'Amour first introduced me to Plutarch and Virgil. In high school I read what I wanted and skimmed through assignments until they caught my interest. As a high school senior I took an elective class called The Novel. Mr. Smith gave us *Advise and Consent* (Drury), *The President's Plane Is Missing* (Serling), and *Exodus* (Uris); but he also snuck in *The Stranger* (Camus and Gilbert), *Face of a Hero* (Boulle), and *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoyevsky). All of these books were great "reads," but as the semester rolled along I understood that some were also great literature. We didn't have many discussions in the class; it was an early, extended version of silent sustained reading. I couldn't have said much about *Crime and Punishment* anyway, except that it was the greatest thing I had ever read. It drew me back again and again.

OK, so maybe Parker's reference to Stout does not meet everyone's requirement for a quality literary allusion. But just as Mr. Smith encouraged me to read Drury, Serling, and Uris before Camus, Boulle, and Dostoyevsky, maybe we can allow Parker to push Stout as he mentions Dickens and Faulkner. Do we really want to scrutinize everything that students finally read or do we want to encourage students to read widely on their own? I know that reading Parker's books along with others described here provided me with hours of enjoyment—and insight.

Sadly, Robert B. Parker died at his writing desk on January 20, 2010. I will miss his new releases. Rest in peace.

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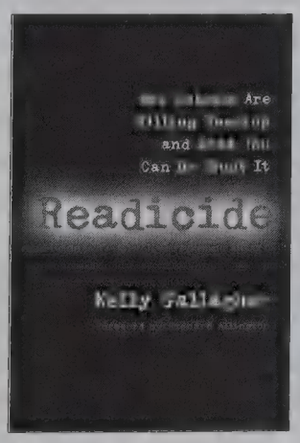
Research for the Classroom

Despite our proclivity for reading—and our best intentions—it can be difficult for English teachers to find time to engage with professional texts. It is critical, though, to connect with authors who can provide a context for the effects of policies on our practices and provide a voice for those of us who see how political decisions affect our students. *Readicide* by Kelly Gallagher is exactly this type of book. It links high-stakes assessment with daily instruction, relating both of these factors to the future of this generation of adolescents. Kathleen Dudden Rowlands's review highlights key aspects of Gallagher's argument and illustrates why it is a "must read" for today's English teachers.

Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do about It

Kelly Gallagher. Portland: Stenhouse, 2009. 150 pp. $17.50. ISBN: 978-1-57110-780-0.



Reviewed by Kathleen Dudden Rowlands
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Kelly Gallagher has nailed it. He has given classroom teachers a clear overview of the complex political and policy issues surrounding current (and largely flawed) literacy instruction, and he has combined that overview with practical, student- and classroom-tested approaches to countermand the damage those policies generate. In this well-researched and carefully documented account, Gallagher explains how the current high-stakes testing climate has reshaped classroom instruction in ways that "murder" reading (hence "readicide")—both for pleasure and for competence, in and out of the classroom. At the same time he offers teachers original instructional alternatives that he uses successfully with his urban public school students.

Gallagher defines *readicide* as "the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (2). Calling on well-known and increasingly dire reports from the research arms of NAEP, ACT, and the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, among others, that document diminishing adolescent literacy proficiencies, he minces no words in painting a chilling portrait of the United States as a nation populated by increasing numbers of marginally literate citizens.

Some may find it disingenuous to draw on reports from organizations known for standardized testing to document the decline of literacy caused, in part, by a reliance on such assessments. However, well-established national tests such as the SAT, ACT, and even the NAEP are not the root of the problem. Such examinations are taken annually at most. Some are taken by choice and only once in a student's academic career.

In response to the No Child Left Behind Act, however, all states now require additional examinations to determine a school's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). Furthermore, many states have instituted high school exit examinations as well. Coupled with school or district "periodic assessments," typically given every few months so that schools won't be caught off guard by students who are ill-prepared for state tests, these additional examinations crowd the school calendar, taking valuable instructional time from authentic reading (and writing) experiences.

Gallagher acknowledges the "usual suspects" that have negative influences on literacy—"poverty, lack of parental education, print-poor environments at home, second-language issues, the era of

the hurried child, and other (and easier) entertainment options" (4), but he also argues that four key factors in teachers' instructional practices contribute to readicide:

- Schools value the development of test-takers more than they value the development of readers
- Schools are limiting authentic reading experiences
- Teachers are overteaching books
- Teachers are underteaching books (5)

Gallagher spends a full chapter unpacking each of these sources of readicide, closing each chapter with a section he calls "What You Can Do to Prevent Readicide."

Chapter 1: "The Elephant in the Room"

In this first chapter, Gallagher considers the American overemphasis on testing and how that emphasis translates into schools that focus on "raising state-mandated reading test scores" (7) instead of developing students' reading proficiencies and enhancing student enjoyment of reading. The emphasis on multiple-choice test preparation, he observes, leads schools to replace rich reading experiences with content "coverage" and test preparation, which leads, in turn, to shallow teaching and learning. Examples are far too easy to find. A colleague tells of an elementary teacher who—in a misguided attempt to improve the fluency of her third graders—has them read the same leveled text ten times. A high school sophomore identifies four favorite books (*Island of the Blue Dolphins, The Giver, Of Mice and Men,* and *The Pigman*). While she enjoyed reading these on her own, she notes that reading them for school "sucked" because "after every chapter I had to write a pointless and useless summary and answer a bunch of irritating questions . . . [followed by] projects and essays." These are perfect, real-world examples of readicide!

Gallagher argues that rich experiences with texts are precisely what our underprepared students need to develop the authentic literacies required for academic success (and, most likely, better performance on the tests). He suggests that changes in our practice can come only when all the players—"teachers, students, administrators, literacy coaches, superintendents, board members, legislators, newspaper reporters" (24)—are willing to take a hard, honest look at young readers and what is happening to them in school. The final section of the first chapter provides a list of provocative questions designed to spark such "hard talk" about reading and reading instruction (24–25). For example, we should ask ourselves, "What do we mean when we say our school 'values' reading?" and "Are our students being trained to think deeply? Is width drowning depth?" (24).

Chapter 2: "Endangered Minds"

Gallagher begins his second chapter with an anecdote describing two twelfth-grade students who—five years after 9/11—had never heard of al Qaeda. When reading a newspaper editorial in class they ask him, "Who is this Al guy?" (27). Moments such as these foreground the lack of authentic reading experiences many students have in our schools. Even by the time they are old enough to vote, many students often remain frighteningly ignorant about world affairs and national politics. In our push toward instruction that "covers" multiple state standards in preparation for too-frequent district or state tests, we have created school settings that offer teachers limited opportunities to include reading real-world materials. Disregarding authentic reading materials has additional consequences. Time spent on test preparation is time lost for working with provocative and challenging reading materials. The materials students are offered for test preparation are often dreary, leading students to view reading as a genuinely uninteresting enterprise. As a result, students do too little reading of any kind. Further, school may be the only place where students from less-advantaged households encounter newspapers, magazines, or journals. If the only reading schools offer is comprised of textbooks and traditionally canonical novels, students may never have the opportunity to discover texts that engage them as independent readers.

Gallagher argues that when teachers are told there is no money for books, they need to take a stand, propelling their battle to the public if need be. In addition, he suggests that teachers might add real-world texts—for example, newspaper and magazine articles, blogs, and editorials—to their students' reading experiences. And, finally, he proposes that teachers poll their students to

find out how much reading they are doing during a school day—and then use those data to convince colleagues and administrators that change is needed.

Chapters 3 and 4: "Avoiding the Tsunami" and "Finding the 'Sweet Spot' of Instruction"

Gallagher's third and fourth chapters focus on instruction. In too many classrooms, he suggests, students "are drowning in a sea of sticky notes, marginalia, and double-entry journals" (59). Everything students read—literature or nonfiction—is overanalyzed in the name of reading instruction. Gallagher supports balancing student independent pleasure reading with enough instruction to help students grapple with textual complexities. He derides what he calls a "chop-chop reading philosophy" that leads teachers to overanalyze and overwork everything they ask students to read (87). This, he notes, sucks the life (and the pleasure) out of reading for both competent and struggling students.

At the same time, Gallagher emphasizes the differences between teaching reading and assigning reading. Handing students books without providing an appropriate level of support is just as likely to create readicide as over-teaching a book. He provides multiple examples of richly detailed, classroom-tested teaching suggestions that are certain to help teachers at all levels envision and implement effective pedagogies for their classrooms.

Chapter 5: "Ending Readicide"

In his final chapter Gallagher foregrounds two important findings from a nonprofit research group that studied national reading scores since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002. Although the study found that scores in most states increased, two additional findings received less publicity. First, many states lowered standards to meet the law's demand that students become proficient by 2014; second, elementary and middle school students made better progress than high school students did. Citing the National Endowment of the Arts report *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence,* Gallagher notes that while test scores may be rising, we seem to be "killing off a generation of readers" in the process (112).

Sad—and Sadly True

Every semester my students—credential candidates and experienced English teachers alike—tell stories that reflect what Gallagher calls the "mind-numbing practices" of school. Focused on teaching the content of each text (instead of teaching students *how* to read and enjoy complex texts), administrators provide pacing plans and detailed worksheets that force teachers to spend two or three months "covering" *Mockingbird* or *Mango Street.* Teachers are required to write the day's standards on the board so students can copy them into their journals—and recite them to any administrator who stops by to ask what they are "covering" that day. History teachers tell students what they need to know to "meet the standards" instead of teaching them how to grapple with a difficult textbook.

It is easy for this book to make readers angry. It certainly had that effect on me. But anger isn't enough. *Readicide* is a call to action, and readers from all professions would do well to heed it. If we have any hope of supporting the development of genuine readers, we must begin at once to dismantle the policies and practices that suck time and opportunity away from authentic reading experiences. Unless we do, we can expect to confront generations of students who know little of the world, and worse—who lack both the curiosity and the literacy skills to dismantle that ignorance.

It is easy for this book to make readers angry. It certainly had that effect on me. But anger isn't enough.

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Success with ELLs

Using Your State's Travel Websites to Promote Academic Vocabulary

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At the beginning of this school term, my administration did a fabulous job providing our staff with a new vision or way of thinking about how we teach: "Use what we have, use what we have access to, and use what is already created for you." That seemingly ambiguous sentence has continued to provide me with a new and somewhat different way to teach vocabulary to my students using what has already been created on the Internet.

I reviewed my students, their histories, and what accommodations they may need in my Language Arts and Social Studies classroom. I found that about a third of my students in each class block were ELLs who were past the newcomer stage of learning the English language but were not yet proficient at an eighth-grade reading and writing level. I then consulted with our school's literacy coach and the ESL teacher assigned to the eighth grade. In the end, we created a plan that focused on providing the ELL learners with a solid vocabulary base of both academic and social words. I was on cloud nine: I had a plan. Now what? I had a momentary panic attack and my bliss of having a plan gave way to the reality of the logistics of teaching the needed vocabulary to the English language learners in my classroom! It was then that the words of the administration came back to me and I went to what I had access to: the Internet.

And the Research Shows

Our plan was based on the fact that English language learners need a strong introduction to vocabulary of all kinds to help them progress with their everyday and academic language skills (Freeman and Freeman 33). Classrooms that are language rich provide an ideal arena to help accelerate a student's language development (Bauer and Manyak 176). When teachers provide opportunities for vocabulary development, a student can then find the connection he or she needs to connect to the subject and the language itself. By providing these opportunities, an accelerated learning occurs, which is crucial to ensure teens don't slip through the cracks and lose their chance for an education (Zuger 14).

A growing trend in vocabulary acquisition is the use of technology in the classroom. For teachers to adequately meet the needs of English language learners, all teachers must become familiar with available techniques and technology resources (Lacina 115). Since our nation's schools have various access and technological abilities, a teacher needs to look for ready-made technology opportunities. Every state in the United States has a travel and tourism website. Most of the states include video, PowerPoint slides, or YouTube links that highlight various features, exhibits, or regions of that state. When teachers access these multimedia products, not only do they save time but they also have a ready-made vocabulary lesson that will help all language learners acquire the terms and phrases that are part of the region and state in which they live.

Every state in the United States has a travel and tourism website. Most of the states include video, PowerPoint slides, or YouTube links that highlight various features, exhibits, or regions of that state.

Beginning the Itinerary

Since my first unit was on North Carolina, its people, the geography, and the regional differences within our state, I started my online search with our state's department of tourism websites (http://www.visitnc.com and http://www.nchistoricsites.org). It was at these websites that I found a gold mine of resources for my classroom and my students. Premade photo stories featuring the regions of our state, PowerPoint presentations, articles, information links, state historic site references, maps, and more were available at the click of my mouse. By using the sites' features, I have been able to help my students recall prior knowledge, develop vocabulary, create meaningful introductions to words and their meanings, and reinforce the correct usage of the words as we revisit the sites and their links. Together my students and I have found the following ways to use North Carolina's State Travel and Tourism websites to build our vocabulary base.

1. Using Regional Slideshow Videos to Introduce and Review Unit Vocabulary

Over 20 premade PowerPoint slide/video shows are accessible on North Carolina's travel website. These shows run about three minutes and feature the regions, historic sites, and important venues in our state. Many of these videos are collections of still photography set to music or a simple narration at the beginning of the video.

I have my students watch the film the first time without doing anything with paper or pencil. We then talk about what they saw that was familiar to them. Many of my ELL students share stories about the weather they saw or a particular image that stood out to them in the video. We then write these items down on the board using the Mimio/Smartboard and underline any key terms or vocabulary that are necessary knowledge for the unit.

Next, I show the video again. As the students watch, they are free to write down any words or phrases that they may not have noticed in the first viewing. Many times they describe, label, or wonder about what they see. A student's paper looks similar to the following list for the video highlighting North Carolina's coast: *beach, sand hills, waves, flying something, golf, fish, islands, sun, hot.*

Each student then shares a word or phrase from his or her paper that represents what is most important to him or her. Students may repeat a word already used by another student only if they add an adjective descriptor or verb to create a phrase—this encourages them to play with vocabulary. For example, instead of "sand hill," someone might say "hang gliding from the sand hills." This, in turn, may help the student who created the above list of words identify what that "flying something" is.

As the students share their words, I add this information to our list on the front board. Once everyone has shared, we review the list, speculating about what words are possible key terms for the unit. I save these lists and frequently refer to them as we move through the unit to review and reflect on our ideas.

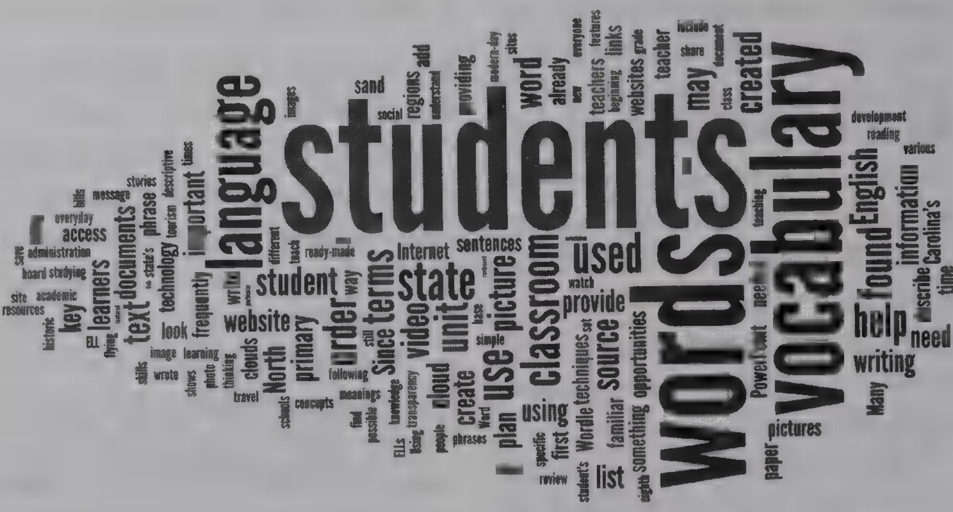
2. Photo Stills and Writing Skills

My students were so intrigued by the vocabulary videos that they suggested we look at more photos of the areas we were studying in social studies. My students and I agreed that it is easier to remember something when you can picture it. This is reminiscent of a vocabulary technique called PWIM, or Picture Word Induction Model, created by Emily F. Calhoun, that uses pictures containing familiar objects, actions, and scenes to help students add words to their vocabulary. Since frequent field trips were not possible, we set out to find pictures to represent the words we were studying.

Each student found a picture either in a book or from the Internet and then used that model as a "frame" for writing. They placed an overhead transparency over the top of each picture and wrote descriptive sentences about the picture around it on the transparency. The sentences needed to be descriptive and to explain the words or concepts that were featured in the photo. As my students began writing, they had to think about what they wrote and how to express the information needed to understand why and how the terms were important. When they finished, the students had a blueprint type outline of the picture and a description of how or why key concepts from the pictures were important to the unit.

3. Interpreting Text Using Word Clouds

As the unit progresses or as students face more difficult text, try reversing or funneling the text by



Porsche L. Sims uses word clouds to help her students investigate primary texts. This word cloud, created by Nicole Galante using Wordle (http://www.wordle.net/), highlights key words from this article.

creating a Wordle image. Wordle (http://www.wordle.net/) is self-described as "a toy for generating 'word clouds' from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text. You can tweak your clouds with different fonts, layouts, and color schemes." You and your students can input text from websites, textbooks, or their writing to create a visual representation of the words used to describe a concept.

My students and I used Wordle when investigating primary source documents from our state's historical sites and the Library of Congress' documents collection. Often the words and language used in a primary source are confusing, but by breaking the complex sentences into a "cloud" of specific terms, students can then create a more accurate reading of the information in the primary source.

The choice of documents to "cloud" is endless and may include the Declaration of Independence, Roosevelt's Pearl Harbor speech, a slave narrative, or a soldier's letter home from a war. As a class we investigated the importance of the words and identified the key terms, people, and descriptors while interpreting the purposes of the words that were most frequently used. My students would then use the words in the word cloud to write a modern-day version of the primary source that still conveyed the same message. Those modern-day versions allowed my students to study how words are used to convey a message and the impact a word or phrase can have on the overall intent of the document. They then posted their modern-day interpretations on our classroom blog, allowing fellow classmates to read, compare, and comment on each other's interpretation of the document.

These are just three simple techniques that I use in my classroom. Since most of my classes include ELLs and native English speakers, I use these techniques with all my students. I have found that when students understand the words and their meanings, their critical-thinking skills improve because they feel confident in using the words to describe the *how, why,* and *because* of events and issues. By linking vocabulary to images and then linking those images to students' everyday lives, I have found teaching vocabulary to be much less of a chore and more enjoyable for everyone in the room.

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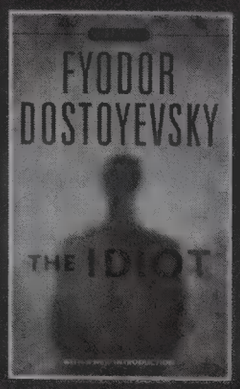

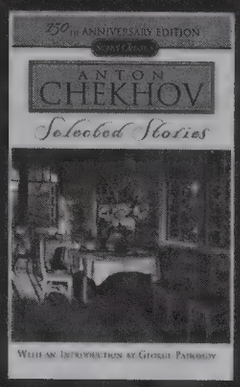

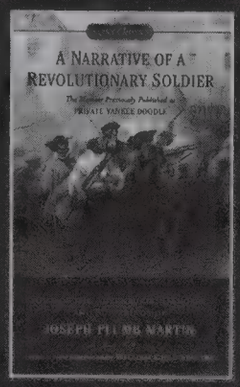

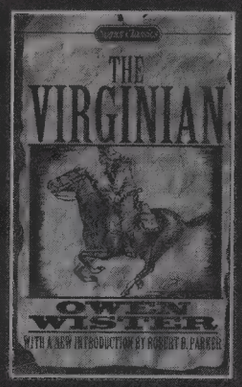

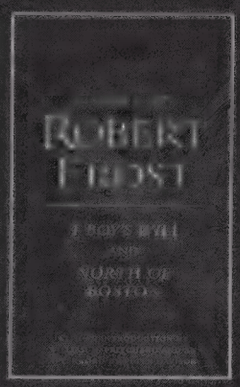

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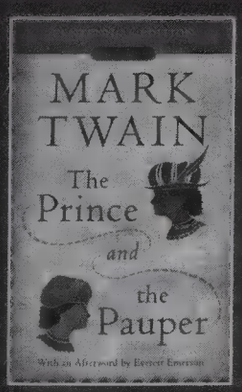

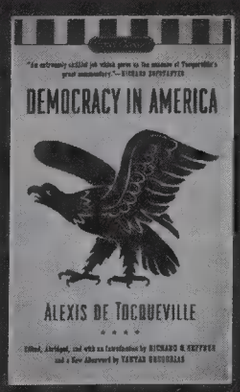

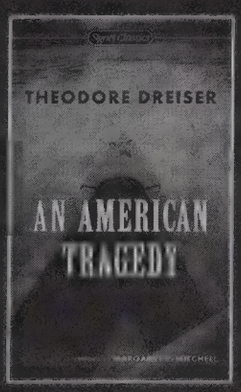

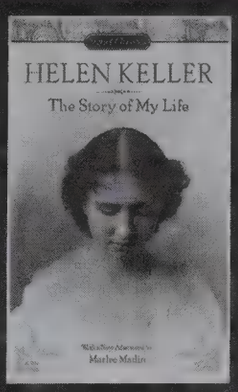

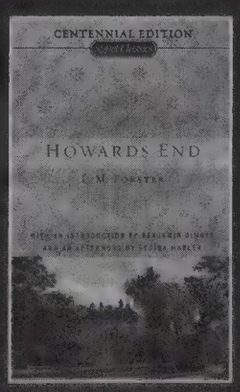

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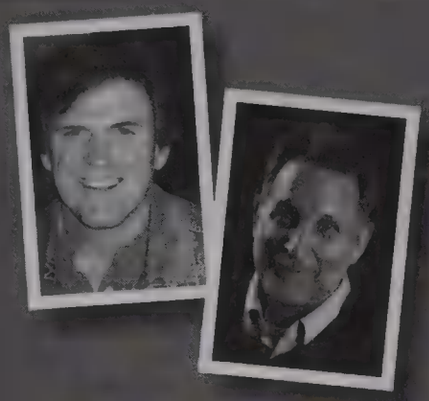

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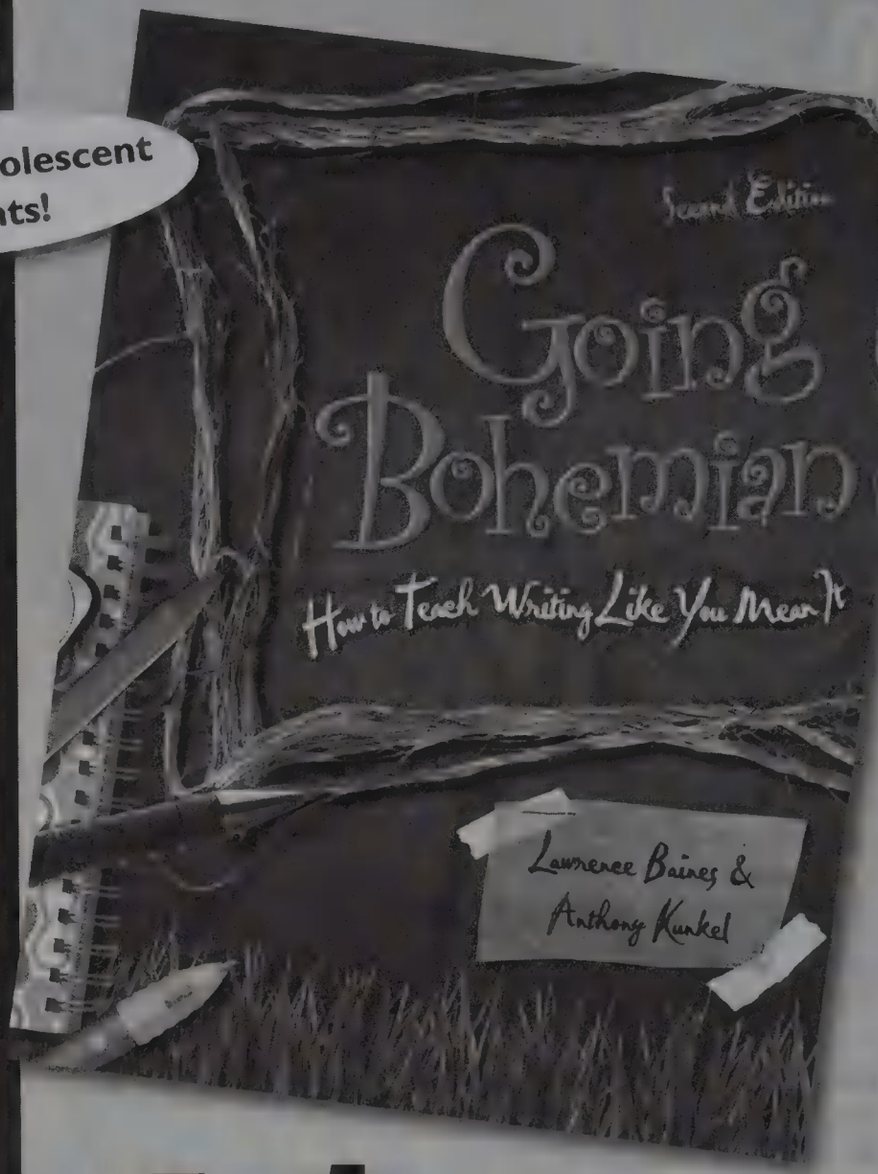

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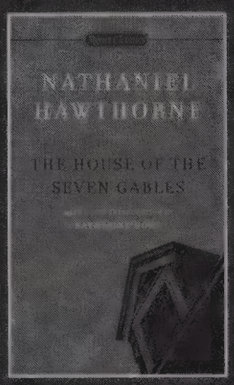

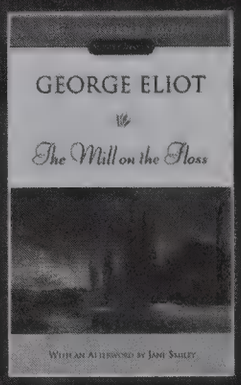

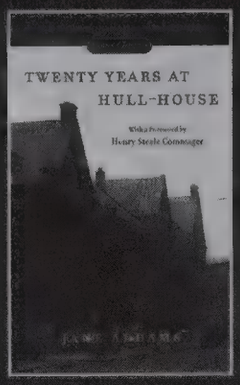

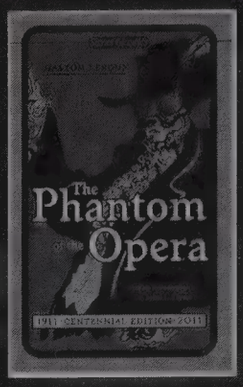

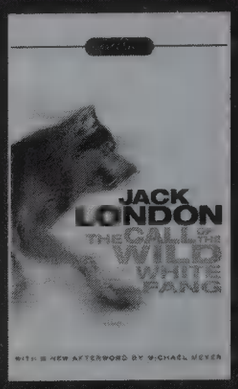

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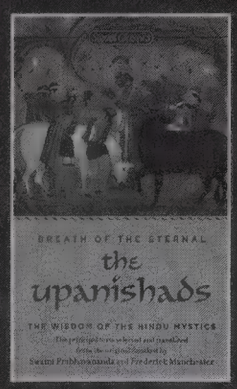

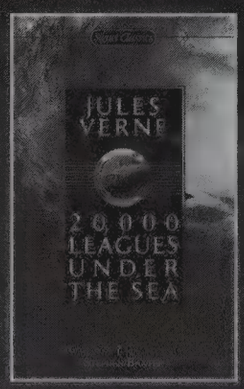

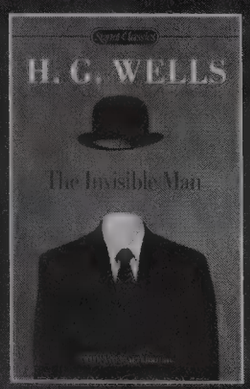

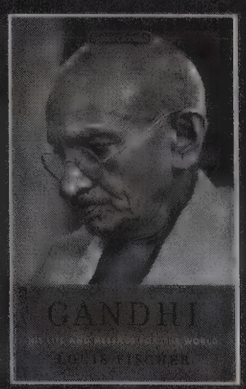

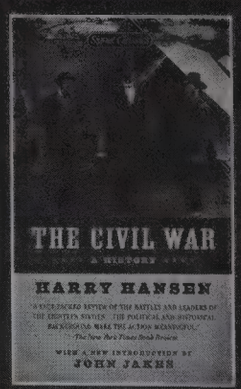

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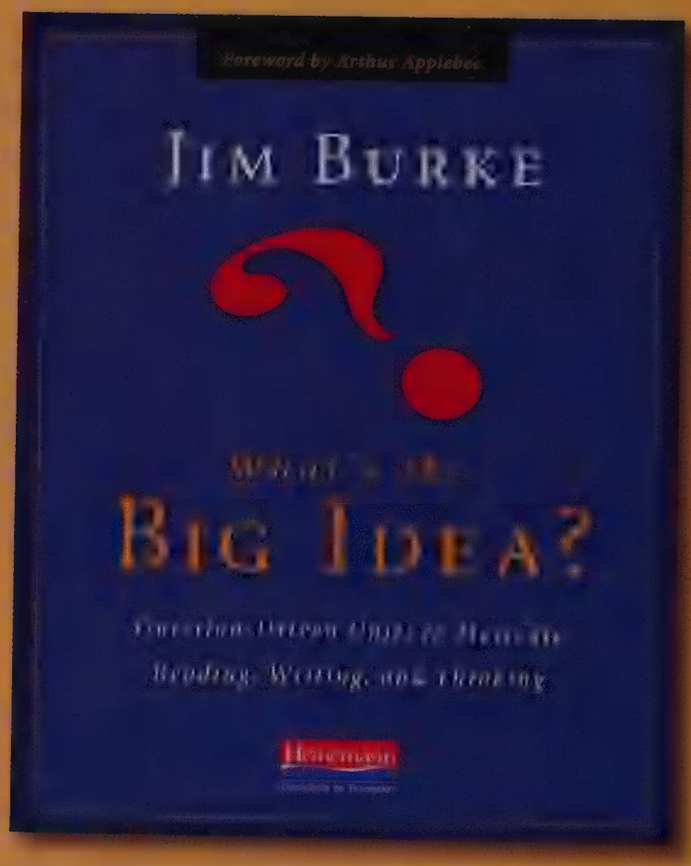

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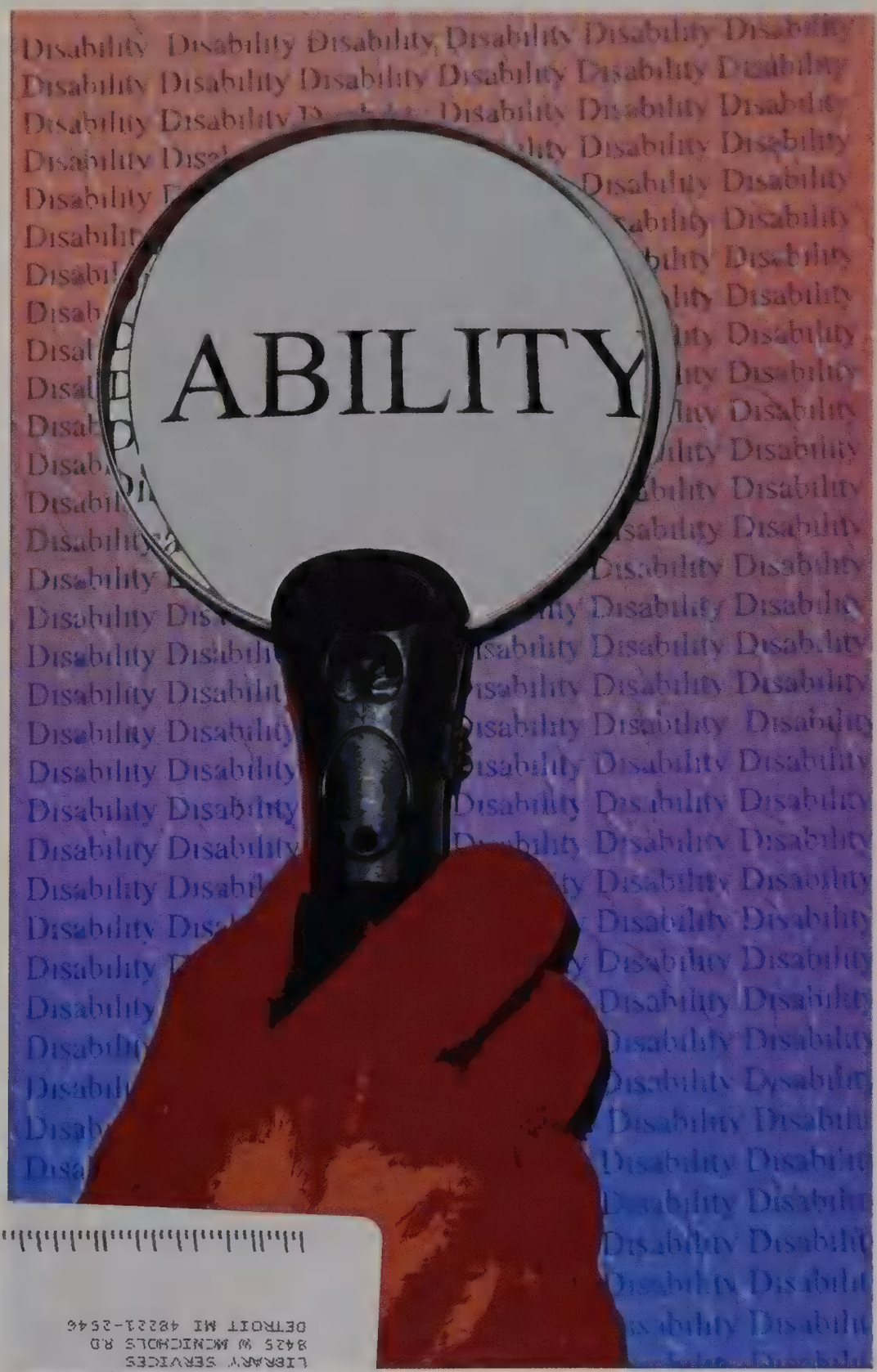

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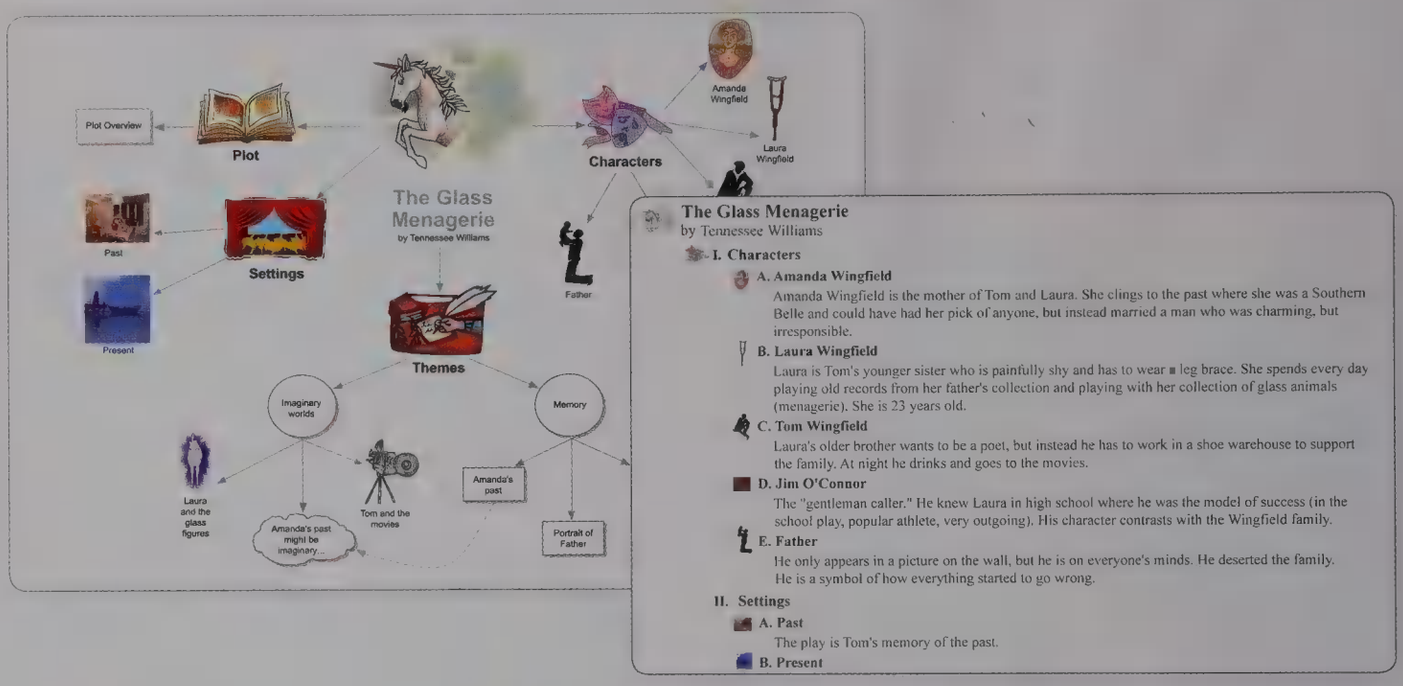

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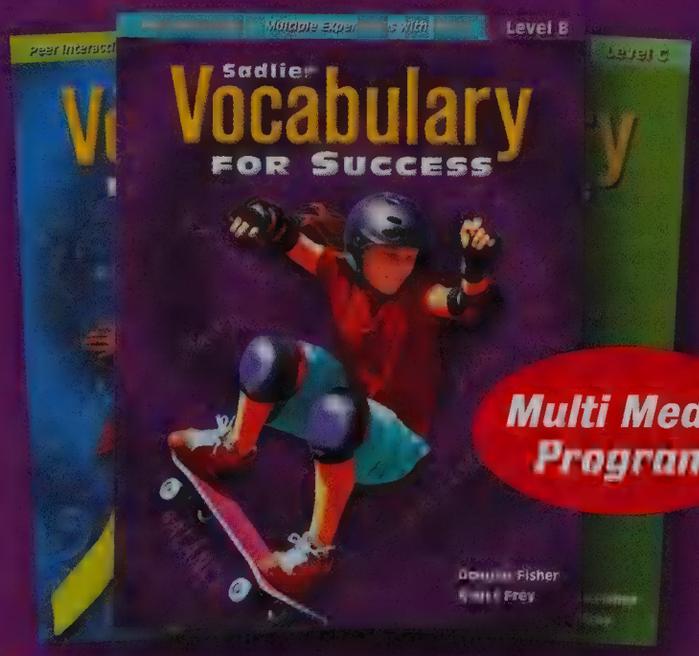

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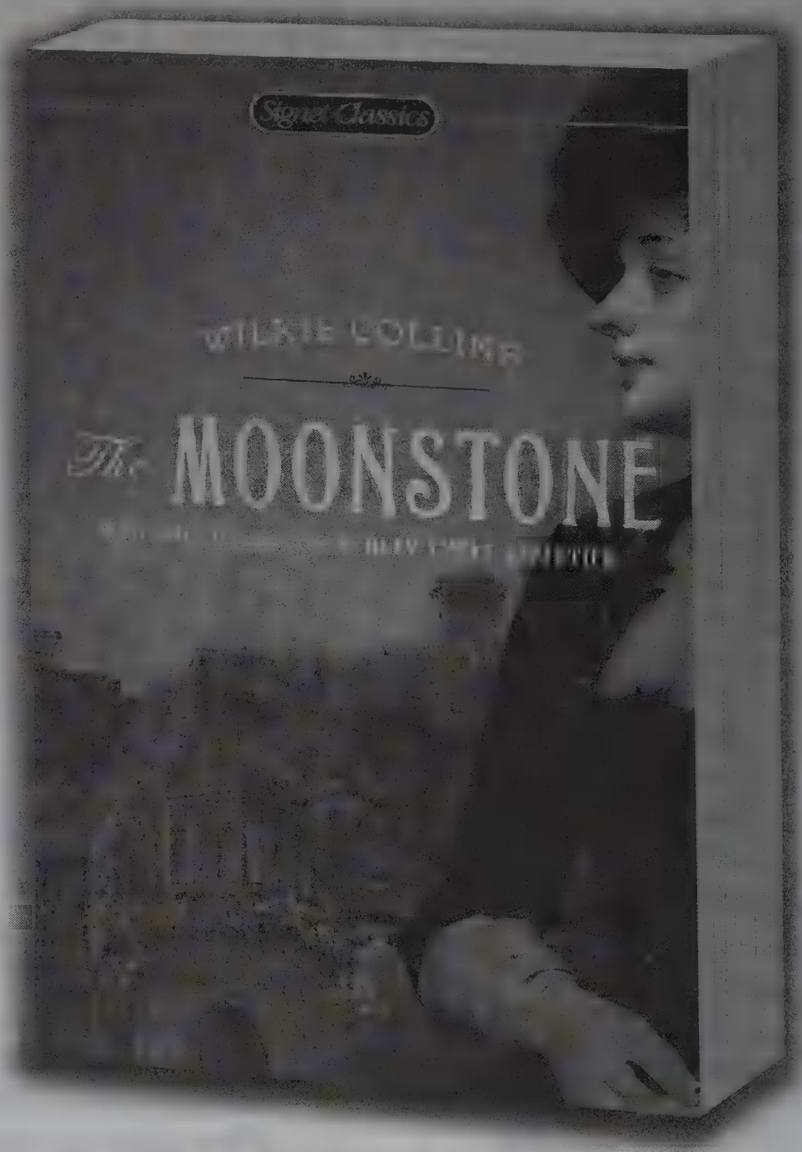

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Call for Manuscripts

Send manuscripts to

Ken Lindblom, Editor
English Journal
Stony Brook University
English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be sent by email as an attachment to English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with standard margins. Word 2000 or later is preferred. Authors using Macintosh software should save their work as Word for Windows. **Paper submissions should be sent only when email is impossible.** Please save copies of anything you send us. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 10 to 15 double-spaced, typed pages in length (approximately 2,500 to 3,750 words).
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the NCTE *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language.* (See address below.)
- Number all pages.
- Use in-text documentation, following the current edition of the *MLA Handbook.* Where applicable, a list of works cited and any other bibliographic information should also follow MLA style.
- List your name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and email address on the title page only, not on the manuscript. Receipt of manuscripts will be acknowledged by email, when possible, or by mail.

English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by two or more outside reviewers. We will attempt to reach a decision on each article within five months. The decision on pieces submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

Prospective contributors should obtain a copy of the *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language* from the NCTE website at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang.

The NCTE Centennial Celebration: Reading the Past, Writing the Future
Publication Date: September 2011
Guest Editor: Leila Christenbury, Virginia Commonwealth University

The National Council of Teachers of English turns 100! Chair of the Task Force for Council History and 2011 Leila Christenbury will commission essays to commemorate a century of literacy education. No unsolicited submissions will be considered for this special issue.

Students Reading and Writing for Their Own Purposes
Deadline: March 15, 2011
Publication Date: November 2011

One of the unique aspects of English language arts is that its focus on developing literacy skills allows teachers to integrate students' personal interests and goals directly into the curriculum. In fact, NCTE's Learning Standard 12 is about just that: "Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)." As important as helping students to develop an inclination and ability to use their literacy skills for their own purposes is, some would argue it's among the least emphasized of the twelve NCTE Standards. This standard is not easily assessed, nor do prepackaged curricula generally accommodate students' individual goals and interests. To raise awareness of and share strategies for fulfilling this important standard, the November 2011 *English Journal* is devoted to the ways in which teachers can and should incorporate students' purposes in English classes.

How have you creatively integrated students' personal goals and desires into your reading and writing assignments? What methods have you developed for soliciting students' individual interests and helping students to advance them in ways appropriate to English language arts? How have you helped students understand that literacy can help them achieve their own goals? What is the effect on the quality of student work of incorporating students' purposes into your curriculum? How have you connected students with people and organizations outside your classroom: in the larger school, the community, national and regional organizations, online communities, and so on? How have media and Web 2.0 technologies enhanced your ability to engage students personally in ELA? Any article addressing the ways in which students' own purposes may be highlighted in English class is welcome for this issue.

Celebrating a Century of *English Journal*
Publication Date: January 2012

The first *English Journal* was published in January 1912. In the January 2012 issue, we'll offer critical perspectives on 100 years of English teaching theory and practice, retrospectives from former *EJ* editors, and more. We will not accept unsolicited manuscripts for this issue, but those interested in writing for this special issue should contact *EJ* editor Ken Lindblom at kenneth.lindblom@stonybrook.edu.

General Interest
May submit any time

We publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles foreground classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

Ongoing Features

Speaking My Mind: We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear with your photo in a future issue of *English Journal.* We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects.

Student Voices: This is a forum for students to share their experiences and recommendations in short pieces of 300 words. Teachers are encouraged to submit the best responses from their classes, not whole class sets, please. Individual students are welcome to submit as well. Topics are as follows:

- How and when has an English assignment allowed you to write, read, or present something that was truly important to you? (Deadline: March 15, 2011)

Teacher to Teacher: This is a forum for teachers to share ideas, materials, and activities in short pieces of 300 words. Topics are as follows:

- What unusual personal purpose has a student been able to fulfill as part of your English class? (Deadline: March 15, 2011)

Original Photography

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be sent as 8" × 10" black-and-white glossies or as an electronic file in a standard image format at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer's name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

Original Cartoons

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. Line drawings in black ink should be submitted on $8^1/_2$" × 11" unlined paper and be signed by the artist.

Columns and Column Editors

Challenging Texts
Editor: P. L. Thomas

Franz Kafka proclaimed that a "book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." The authors and texts we bring into our classrooms and the acts of literacy that students perform about and because of those texts are essential aspects of creating classrooms where students become critical readers and critical writers. This column will explore the authors and texts we choose that confront the world and the worldviews of students. We also explore various theoretical approaches to literature that challenge and energize students and teachers.

Contributors should explore and share their classroom practices that address questions such as, What authors and texts confront the world and students' assumptions? What texts expand students' perceptions of and assumptions about genre? What texts confront both big ideas and the art and craft of writing? How does critical pedagogy look in literature classrooms? What literary theories do you find most generative?

Submit an electronic Word file attached to your email to the column editor, P. L. Thomas, at paul.thomas@furman.edu. Contributors are encouraged to query the column editor and share drafts of column ideas as part of the submission process.

Mentoring Matters
Editor: Thomas M. McCann

Some critics use the disturbing phrase "eating their young" to refer to the way some school leaders and veteran teachers treat new teachers. The image refers to the regrettable practice of allowing the newcomer to endure the least desirable conditions in a school or department. In contrast, caring veteran teachers will be sensitive to the need to foster growth and to promote a sense of self-efficacy in new colleagues. The development of any teacher is not complete after departure from a teacher preparation program. Professional growth continues for years, and supportive colleagues can play a significant role in influencing the development, satisfaction, and retention of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This column invites contributors to offer practicing teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs their insights about how to mentor and support early-career English teachers, including reports from early-career teachers about their positive mentoring experiences. We especially encourage specific suggestions for practices that will help veteran teachers to support newer colleagues in developing positive relationships with students, contending with pressures to conform to test-driven curricula, handling an enormous workload, and forming collaborative relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and parents.

We invite column contributions of 500–1,500 words addressing themes about mentoring and supporting early-career teachers. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Thomas M. McCann at tmccann1@niu.edu.

Off the Shelves
Editor: Mark Letcher

We are living in a new golden age of young adult literature. Edgy and engaging titles by authors both emerging and established have been pushing the field of young adult literature (YAL) to places we've never seen before. Teen readers are seeing more innovative formats and genre-blending in their reading, are exposed to authors from around the world, and are blurring the lines between previously established "teen" and "adult" fiction.

There may be no better time to celebrate and promote the diversity, characters, issues, and pure literary craftsmanship that YAL offers its audience, and our hope is that you will help us contribute to the conversation.

This column will explore a wide range of topics related to literature written for and/or read by young adults, with a strong emphasis on recently published works. We particularly welcome the voices and experiences of secondary teachers, for whom YAL provides vital classroom reading, suggestions for eager and reluctant students, and engaging personal reading material.

Submissions of 500–1,500 words, inquiries, and suggestions for future column topics should be directed to Mark Letcher at mark.letcher@purduecal.edu.

Poetry
Editor: Anne McCrary Sullivan

In her poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," Naomi Shihab Nye reminds us that "poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes, / they are sleeping." Look inside your shoes, your desk drawers and kitchen cabinets, the hallways of your school, the grocery stores and garbage dumps of your community. "Find" some poems and send them to *EJ*. Choose those that seem a fit, either explicitly or implicitly, with announced themes of upcoming *EJ* issues. We are looking for well-crafted original poems in any style, serious or humorous, written by teachers, students, or those who love them. We do not consider previously published poems or simultaneous submissions.

Send by email attachment, for blind review, up to five poems with only phone number and initials on the page. In your email message, include brief biographical information. Poets whose work is published will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Send submissions to EJPoetry@nl.edu. Send correspondence to Anne McCrary Sullivan at ASullivan@nl.edu.

Professional Writing in the English Classroom
Editors: Jonathan Bush and Leah Zuidema

Professional writing in the English classroom is rich with possibilities. Students can learn to attend carefully to audience, purpose, and situation through all genres of writing,

but these rhetorical concerns are especially relevant in professional writing contexts. This column focuses on the teaching of professional writing—writing that solves day-to-day problems, accomplishes work, and enables changes in organizations and communities. Professional writing instruction involves much more than teaching memos, proposals, or résumés; it can also be a way to teach for engaged, ethical citizenship. It encompasses ideas consistent with best practices in our discipline—allowing students to think creatively and critically within complex rhetorical situations. It values multiple genres, textual conventions, and visual design. Through professional writing, students can address real issues (big or small) and work to effect change by writing to authentic audiences.

Professional writing can be combined with other, more traditional studies of writing, literature, and language. This column helps readers who seek to teach professional writing concepts and to expand their teaching to include new projects and genres. We welcome contributions from those who teach professional writing as well as those who see echoes of professional writing concepts in their other work with writing, literature, and language. Please send inquiries, submissions of 500–1,500 words, or suggestions for future column topics to Jonathan Bush at jbush@wmich.edu or Leah Zuidema at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom
Editor: Julie Gorlewski

Research provides a lens through which teachers can better understand our pedagogical successes and failures. Research illuminates the social and political contexts of education, enhancing our appreciation of students, their families, and the communities we serve. The principles of research offer a foundation for reflective practice.

Classrooms are laboratories for teaching and learning. In this era of accountability, it is important for teachers to apply research to practice. We must be collaborators in the process of deciding what works, not merely consumers of products deemed "research-based." In the spirit of a critical theoretical approach, this column will seek both to clarify and to problematize research-based practices.

Submissions for this column might include an informal mini-study or a story about an attempt—successful or not—to conduct classroom research. Contributors should focus on a classroom application of professional scholarship by considering these questions: What worked (and didn't work) in my classroom? Why? How do I know? Also welcome are short reviews of recently published books that contributors believe can enhance teachers' classroom research practices. Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words.

Authors, especially new contributors, are encouraged to submit ideas for columns. Send inquiries or submissions to gorlewsj@newpaltz.edu.

Success with ELLs
Editor: Margo DelliCarpini

English educators face increasing linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In fact, enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in the nation's public schools between the years 1990 and 2000 grew by 105%, compared to a 12% overall growth rate among the general school population. ELLs enter our classrooms with a variety of prior school experiences, cultural expectations, and literacy experiences. Making the English language arts curriculum accessible to ELLs can pose unique challenges. However, when teachers implement strategies that target the needs of ELLs, all students can benefit.

This column will be a place where classroom teachers can find helpful ideas for teaching ELLs. Please submit manuscripts regarding challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream English classes and how you have developed innovative strategies to address their needs while enhancing the learning environment for all learners. Please share materials and practices that you have found to be especially effective for your ELLs, reports of successful collaborative instruction, motivational strategies that you use, and ways you connect content to ELLs' lives. Secondary-level English teachers are especially encouraged to submit their ideas. New authors who have ideas for columns that need development are encouraged to contact the editor. Send ideas or complete submissions of 500–1,500 words to Margo DelliCarpini at margo.dellicarpini@lehman.cuny.edu.

Teaching Young Adult Literature
Editor: Mike Roberts

As English teachers, we are constantly faced with the challenge of teaching literature that is both thought-provoking *and* entertaining. With today's YA literature better than ever, now is the time to help students discover the joy—and sometimes the pain—that comes with reading a great book. YA literature can provide students with a chance to engage in reading that is meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable. Plus, YA literature can inspire energized discussions about topics students feel passionate about.

This column will explore *teaching ideas and strategies* for some of today's newest and most popular young adult literature. This is not a column that reviews literature; it describes effective ways of *teaching* young adult literature. We encourage submissions of 1,800–2,500 words that focus on effective ways of incorporating YA literature into the curriculum. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Mike Roberts at mikeroberts @rowlandhall.org.

From the Editor

Ken Lindblom
Stony Brook University
State University of New York
kenneth.lindblom@stonybrook.edu

Re-Seeing (Dis)Ability

I met Patricia A. Dunn, this issue's guest editor, the summer after my first year of teaching, when she was already working out the teaching ideas she would later publish in her first book, *Learning Re-Abled: The Learning Disability Controversy and Composition Studies.* In those early years, the English class I taught most often was tenth-grade school level, or "English 10S."

The students in 10S were not motivated by school, but they were honest and fun-loving. Because most of them were from rural areas in upstate New York, they had interests and hobbies that fascinated this city boy, who never cleaned a rifle, didn't know a carburetor from a carpenter's hammer, and thought duck decoys were for decoration. English 10S certainly had its challenges, but I enjoyed working with these students, and they seemed generally open to, even sympathetic to, my often exhausting attempts to motivate them.

Students in 10S groaned appreciatively at my corny jokes and rejected all attempts to get them to do busy work. They'd also often give me unsolicited feedback on my teaching—you know, the kind of advice new teachers can really use: "Class was a little boring today. Maybe work on something more interesting for tomorrow?" "It was good that you brought music into class today. Do more stuff like that." "Don't wear such ugly ties. Do you have a girlfriend who could pick some out for you?" Most of the students already knew what trades they'd go into once they graduated. Almost as a favor to me, they seemed willing to do some schoolwork at least to help pass the time.

I tell my story of 10S because it was in teaching that class that I first learned how effective nontraditional teaching strategies could be with students for whom reading and writing did not come easily. I was lucky to work with students who were willing to try to do well in the class.

Many of the students had diagnosed learning disabilities and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). For some of them, extra time and assistance from the Resource Center were all the accommodations they needed. Other students, with even more time and assistance, seemed to make little progress. Many of these students had virtually undecipherable handwriting, and their spelling was not just nonstandard but very unusual. They also had a great deal of trouble organizing their thoughts in writing. In addition, there was an unexpectedly wide gap between the kinds of intelligence they could display in oral discussion and what would appear—sometimes in answer to the same questions—in their writing.

I described my observations and concerns often to Patricia, who had become an exceptionally good friend, and she kept me apprised of her research on teaching writing to students with learning disabilities. I had a traditional education, and school had always worked pretty well for me. I read and wrote easily, and I had trouble understanding why the students I was teaching couldn't just pick it up as I had and as most of their fellow students did.

Some of the ideas Patricia was suggesting—including using nonprint modes of literacy such as drawing and what we now call graphic organizers and even movement and dance—seemed pretty out there. At first.

The Power of Movement

Alex was a student in English 10S who was the son of the owner of a local garage. He knew he'd graduate in two years and his part-time work with his

father would become full-time, and then one day he'd have a garage of his own. He was no saint in the classroom, but Alex knew that if he was going to run a successful business one day, he'd need to develop his communication skills.

Try as he might, Alex could not organize his writing. His thoughts on paper would fuse together, come in a confusing order, and appear in one paragraph no matter how long. No end of writing conferences or models seemed to help him understand how to compose more effective and conventional prose.

Heavily influenced by Nancie Atwell and Peter Elbow, I engaged students in a lot of group discussion about their writing. During one session, we talked about one of Alex's essays. It was a "how to" essay in which the students were to explain directions for completing a task of their choice. Alex, unsurprisingly, selected changing the oil in a car—an excellent topic. Like most of his other writing, Alex's directions were hard to follow, weren't ordered appropriately, and appeared—as always—in one, long paragraph. It was so obvious to everyone in the class that Alex was an expert in changing oil, but his expertise wasn't translating to his writing. In the open and communal atmosphere we had in this classroom, I decided to adapt one of the wackier methods Patricia had suggested.

I put a student desk in the middle of the room and asked Alex to lie down under it and pretend to be changing the oil in a car. As he mimed the task, he would dictate directions to another student, who would write down exactly what he said. After the first few minutes of laughing about how silly this was, Alex started to get serious.

At one point in this physical composition, Alex leaned over to put down the invisible oil pan, which he had just removed from under the "car." Without any prompting from anyone Alex said, "Wait, I just put the oil pan down and now I'm getting up to dump the oil from the pan. Maybe this is a good place for a new paragraph?"

For someone who picked up paragraphing easily, it seems like nothing. But I had exhausted myself trying to get Alex to understand the abstract concept of paragraphing, to no avail; however, right then, using his experience and his physical motion, Alex got it himself for the first time. I still get chills remembering that moment. For Alex, understanding how to use paragraphs to organize his writing clicked. For me, the value of kinesthetics for teaching clicked.

Patricia Dunn developed her teaching strategies for using motion and other nonprint modes in writing instruction in a second book. I highly recommend her *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing* to anyone interested in further exploring this valuable pedagogy.

Teaching All Students

Readers will find a similar refrain throughout the articles in this issue of *English Journal.* While the topic is about (dis)ability, what good teachers realize is that strategies that work effectively for students with specific reading or writing difficulties actually work well for all students. Yes, some students require additional time or some other accommodation, but many accommodations are effective ways of teaching all students: presenting information in multiple modes (including audio and video); getting students to think in various ways about material they are learning; having students write to specific audiences from which they will garner tangible feedback; composing and manipulating visual images to think about other perspectives; incorporating movement into their thought processes, and so on. The authors in this issue present many excellent strategies for helping all students succeed in English language arts.

I want to thank Patricia Dunn for agreeing to guest edit this important issue of *English Journal.* She has produced a set of remarkably helpful articles packed with excellent and well-founded practical advice for teaching. I hope that as you make use of these articles in your classes, you will understand that it's not the students' abilities that hinder their ability to learn: it's the ways in which schools privilege some ways of learning and discount others. If all teachers were to implement the kinds of strategies discussed in these articles, even supposedly "disabled" students' learning would be—as Patricia's book title suggests—*Re-Abled.*

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Learning about Disability

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"Let me tell you about my life." Amy picked up a checkbook, the current speech book, and the student handbook. "Most of this is just a bunch of marks to me. I can't do the math, read the speech book, or understand all the rules in the handbook."

So began Amy's first speech, a personal biographical essay about what it was like to be a student with a learning disability. She told us about her daily struggle to get ready for school since one of her parents was physically disabled and needed help from her other parent. The school bus, before the district offered special transportation, was filled with little kids half her age who kept asking questions about why she still rode the bus when all the other high school kids had cars. She said she was so lucky that her own classroom was so close to the entrance because she didn't have to worry about finding it through the maze of nondescript halls that epitomize a new school. Amy ended her presentation with her anxieties. While most high school juniors were thinking about college or the next game, Amy was concerned about how she was going to get along after high school when she would not have the kinds of support she was given as a high school student. By the end of her speech, most of the people in the classroom were deeply moved, including me. To communicate to us what her life was like, Amy had shared intimate moments and had risked being ridiculed one more time. But it didn't happen. Several of the students walked Amy out of class that day and asked what they could do to help. One girl even volunteered to pick her up every morning and take her home after school.

Re-Seeing and Re-Hearing (Dis)Ability

It was at this time, 25 years ago, that I realized that along with seeing students with special needs in a new way, I also had to *hear* them in a new way. I realized that there was so much all of us could learn from all students if we dropped our stereotypes and prejudices.

I am lucky to share my classroom with a wonderful special education department that, even after all the cuts in funding, can provide an aide in every core curriculum classroom. Aides read tests, interpret homework, meet with parents, and fill out endless paperwork for Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). They insist the students respond in class discussions, complete in-class writings, stay engaged with daily class work, and make oral presentations. This way, all students can meet my high expectations for this class.

When I teach literature, I have found that students with special needs often respond to those characters in and authors of literature who have been thought different in their personal, if not in their literate, lives. In final portfolio reflections this year, several students wrote about how Emily Dickinson, Frederick Douglass, and Kate Chopin learned to cope with a world that thought them somehow not good enough to be thought normal.

Speech classes provide especially interesting situations for all students. A student may sit quietly in a literature class, but a speech class is both a scary and an inviting forum for all students, regardless of their abilities. All the students are nervous in

speech class, and that nervousness creates a unique bond. Even the most advanced students must control their nerves, and so many times I have seen students with disabilities encourage others to give a speech or make a presentation. Students with special needs are probably more used to feeling exposed and facing public challenges, and in a speech class, this experience may enhance their ability to tackle their nerves and speak in front of an audience. The camaraderie that must exist in performance obligates all adolescents to respect and respond to others' differences and to create a whole, complete presentation. Performances in music and dance may promote the same kinds of camaraderie outside classes, and using performance pedagogies in traditional classes can bring the power of camaraderie to English classes as well.

I continue to be inspired by all my students, and I have learned a great deal from them about teaching students who have a range of abilities. Here is what I've learned:

- All young people deserve an equitable education in a democracy.
- Every student has a story to tell.
- We must be willing as teachers to see and hear what all students are trying to share with us.
- So many factors contribute to students' literacies.
- Technology has allowed students with certain kinds of disability to produce legible writing and bypass the frustration of not being able to read or be understood, and new technologies can help students meet teachers' high expectations.
- Giving a speech in front of a class may be a pathway to making friends and to entering the adult world.

Amy graduated with all the fanfare given to any achieving student. She walked across the floor beaming from ear to ear as a school board member presented her with a diploma and congratulated her on her achievements. I saw her several years later and was both saddened and pleased to learn that she had become a caregiver to both her parents who had become disabled. She worked hard and met a young man at her job whom she later married, both moving in with her parents so she could take care of them. When I see her today, Amy always remembers the speech class where she "stood up and told the other students about my life."

Paper doll children all playing together. © iStockphoto.com/ Stephanie Timmermann

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Re-Seeing (Dis)Ability: Ten Suggestions

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Many English teachers feel underprepared to teach students with disabilities. While teachers may want to do whatever they can to make all their students successful, some may feel that they don't have as much time as they would like to prepare high-quality differentiated instruction, to fully accommodate every student, or even to know what accommodations will work best, even if they are working closely with a special education teacher. In addition, many teachers may not have been exposed, in their teacher preparation programs or in their lives, to perspectives on disability that would help them challenge the limiting perceptions of disability still so pervasive in our society. In recent years, however, a number of developments have evolved to the point where it is possible to rethink disability. The theme of this special issue of *English Journal,* "Re-Seeing (Dis)Ability," invites us all to learn more, to include more people, to change our perspectives, to pose different questions, and to understand more about all students' abilities.

First, new technologies have made it more possible for all students to have better access to, and means of interacting with, texts and other materials in English language arts: audio texts, speech recognition technologies, sophisticated graphic organizers, etc. Some may wonder if using these tools or accommodations might lower expectations. In fact, it's the opposite. These tools challenge us. They raise our expectations. These tools discourage teachers from *not* expecting as much from, say, a student whose eyes cannot read print. These tools also invite students *too* comfortable with working in their preferred comfort zone—say, conventional reading and writing—to venture into other modalities, where they will have insights they would not have had in routine, print-based realms.

Second, the relatively new, interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies challenges us to think about disability as socially constructed: that many barriers encountered by people with disabilities are not the "fault" of their disability per se, but are rather a result of the ways they're treated in society. Disability Studies activists urge us to radically change the way we think about "disability," about what it means to be "normal," and who gets to define those terms.

In English classes today, traditional practices might be creating unnecessary educational barriers for students with disabilities and at the same time limiting learning for all students. Thanks to the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA), ramps, curb cuts, and wide doorways have enhanced physical access for people with disabilities. These changes to the built environment have also created more access for people who use baby strollers, roller blades, moving-day dollies, and suitcases-on-wheels. So what was intended as an accommodation for a few turned out to be a benefit for all. Similarly, altering the way we teach to better accommodate students with disabilities will enhance the learning of all students. Designing our classes and our pedagogies to be more inclusive might reduce the stigma some students feel by asking for special accommodations at the same time it increases learning opportunities for all. What follows are some actions we might take to re-see disability and ability.

Ten Actions We Can Take to Make Our Classes More Welcoming to Students with Disabilities and More Instructive and Challenging for All

1. Take advantage of new technologies.

Today, many technologies that used to be expensive or hard to find and use are now relatively inexpensive, widely available, and easy to use. We now have a variety of technologies students can use, in addition to conventional word processing, to create different compositions: audio, video, film, websites, wikis, blogs, and so on. Students can access, manipulate, and compose text in many ways—visually, auditorially, even kinesthetically—opening many opportunities for teaching.

In their informative *English Journal* article, "Learning to Write: Technology for Students with Disabilities in Secondary Inclusive Classrooms," Patricia M. Barbetta and Linda A. Spears-Bunton summarize the best of these new tools and technologies that make learning more accessible for students with disabilities and, I would argue, for all students. For example, turning conventional text into digitalized text can enable students to adjust print size and background color, making it easier for some people to read. Digitalization also allows the reader or writer to highlight key words or images, or to activate a tool in Microsoft Word called AutoSummarize, which helps foreground main ideas in a text. They also explain text-to-speech technology (TTS), which converts written text to speech. For students who can hear but cannot see, this technology makes written text accessible. TTS could also help many other students access information through both eyes and ears, giving them more options for reading and more opportunities to develop listening skills. TTS also reads back words as students type, helping them find the right words and syntax. Barbetta and Spears-Bunton also describe word prediction technology, which can help all writers stay focused on fluency and content—and not get distracted by poor typing skills or bad spelling. There are also sophisticated graphic organizers, such as those put out by Inspiration Software, Inc., which help students "make graphic connections between and among their ideas—writers can see what their thinking looks like as it develops" (89).

The most exciting of these now widely available technologies is speech/voice recognition, a tool that could change the lives of many writers, with or without disabilities. These programs translate spoken words into typed text: users simply dictate into a microphone, and their words appear on the computer screen. Voice-recognition technology can be a life-altering resource for so many of us, yet it is one of the most underused tools in English classes today. Students with disabilities that cause handwriting, word-processing, or spelling problems might find that being able to *speak* their ideas mitigates many of their difficulties. Those of us who have or develop physical problems with our fingers, hands, wrists, or arms (broken limbs, carpal tunnel syndrome, or arthritis) could continue to "write" with our voices. Or, writers may simply want to see what happens to fluency and thought development when they speak their ideas and let the program word-process them. Where possible, English classes should take far more advantage of speech/voice-recognition technologies, which may increase the fluency and confidence of all writers, and the spelling, even the coherence, in their writing.

The theme of this special issue of *English Journal*, "Re-Seeing (Dis)Ability," invites us all to learn more, to include more people, to change our perspectives, to pose different questions, and to understand more about all students' abilities.

In this issue, Kathleen D. De Mers discusses these and other technological advances that help all people. One such tool is the new, easy-to-use open and closed captioning feature on YouTube, which not only increases accessibility for more users on the Web. It now also provides, to imaginative teachers, a promising vehicle for students to work in creative, rhetorically effective ways with images, sound, *and* written language.

2. Consider the perspective of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS).

The new, interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies shows us how many disabling aspects of a person's experience are constructed by society—by unnecessary barriers. If we can become more aware of these barriers and remove them, it would help us

rethink disability in ways that would benefit everyone. Conventional ways of looking at disability focus on "fixing" people with disabilities, trying to make them "fit" more seamlessly into what is seen as "normal" society. This view is called "the medical model" of disability. Scholars in Disability Studies argue, however, that society itself contributes to the disabling of individuals by creating unnecessary barriers, both physical and social; this view is called "the social model" of disability. As the Society for Disability Studies (SDS) points out in its mission statement, "disability is a key aspect of human experience" (http://www.disstudies.org/about/mission). SDS says there should be "greater awareness of the experiences of disabled people," and SDS members "advocate for social change."

Consider, for example, a person in a wheelchair who cannot get into a building because there is no ramp, and she encounters a set of stairs. Yes, this person has a disability that causes her to use a wheelchair. But what really keeps her from participating more fully in society is a physical barrier that has been built by someone else: the stairs. It's not that architects set out to deliberately bar people in wheelchairs. But much of what was (and sometimes still is) designed in our society privileges the so-called able-bodied: people who can climb stairs, see computer screens, hear directions, and so on. The ADA removed some of those barriers, but many other obstacles remain. Right now the courts must settle disagreements about whether or not an accommodation a person asks for to more fully participate is "reasonable." If accessibility were more a part of our cultural consciousness, if inclusiveness were something we didn't always have to be reminded about, if disability were seen as a part of "normal" life, our buildings and classrooms would not need so much expensive retrofitting and people wouldn't need to have to ask to *not* be excluded. Buildings would be more usable by more people from the beginning, which is the main idea behind Universal Design (see suggestion #7). In the same way stairs are a constructed barrier to buildings, there are constructed educational barriers in our classrooms and in our pedagogies. We can, and should, address those barriers, too.

Exclusionary pedagogies, like stairways, can create unnecessary barriers. © iStockphoto.com/Boguslaw Mazur

Multimodal pedagogies, like wide doorways, can help all students succeed. © iStockphoto.com/Boguslaw Mazur

Several contributors to this special issue of *English Journal* include classroom activities and specific questions informed by a Disability Studies perspective. Tammie M. Kennedy and Tracey Menten describe five activities designed to help students think critically about assumptions made about people with disabilities, activities that also support many NCTE standards. And Daniel L. Preston, in his examination of the popular animated film *Finding Nemo,* includes a copious list of questions teachers can pose, which help students notice when and where characters are treated differently because of a disability or perceived disability.

3. Use literary and other texts as a springboard for informed discussions of disability and ableism.

Ableism occurs when society is organized to accommodate only the needs of its "able-bodied" citizens, leading to discrimination against citizens with disabilities. While English teachers are perhaps used to posing critical questions about a novel's or short story's representation of gender, race, or class, we may be less used to questioning how characters with disabilities are depicted in literature. In the same way we would not allow outdated or discriminatory attitudes about women or people of color to stand unchallenged, we should not allow harmful statements or implicit assumptions about people with disabilities—whether in classic or contemporary literature—to go unchallenged.

Where possible, we should use stories that include characters with disabilities, but without the text succumbing to conventional stereotypes: that the disability somehow symbolizes evil, that the person is helpless, that the person is only to be pitied, etc. Even in less obvious stereotyping, however, we should keep in mind Amy Vidali, Margaret Price, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson's warning against what they call a typical "enlightenment narrative," in which a person with a disability functions primarily as an "educational device" for others, cementing "assumptions about 'disabled' and 'non-disabled' as rigid categories." Rather than opening up questions about definitions of "disability" and "normalcy," such narratives can reinforce "us/them" categories.

If it's not possible to avoid a text with a stereotypical depiction of a person with a disability, we can pose questions that will invite students to recognize and challenge those stereotypes. One of the accomplishments of early feminism was teaching students to become what Judith Fetterley calls "resisting readers." That is, even texts with harmful gender stereotypes could be used to challenge those stereotypes by helping readers first see and then resist them. We can help students become resisting readers of potentially harmful views of disability. In *Stoner and Spaz,* an excellent young adult (YA) novel by Ron Koertge (and winner of the 2003 PEN Center USA Literary Award for Children's Literature), the first-person narrator, Ben Bancroft, who has cerebral palsy, makes a derogatory remark about himself in the first paragraphs of the novel. In buying a single movie ticket, he asks the woman in the booth: "Since it's Monster Week, do I get a discount?" (1). The novel itself helps us resist 16-year-old Ben Bancroft's destructive view of himself, but by posing different questions to students, we can help them further explore the reasons Ben is made to feel he is a "monster." By asking questions about the language used in novels to describe people with disabilities, even how the characters with disabilities describe themselves, we can help students think critically about how those perceived as different are treated in our society.

For a collection of stories that might spark such productive discussions, see *Owning It: Stories about Teens with Disabilities,* a ten-story edited collection by Don Gallo, which includes a story by Ron Koertge. And in his "Off the Shelves" column in this *EJ* issue, Mark Letcher reviews nine different novels about characters who have symptoms of autism spectrum disorders.

For examples of how we might begin discussions of how disability is portrayed in texts, see, also in this issue, Joellen Maples, Katrina Arndt, and Julia M. White's resistant reading of *The Mighty,* the film adaptation of the popular YA novel *Freak the Mighty.* Also in this issue, Tonya Merritt discusses how her new experiences with disability made her see previously unseen and harmful assumptions about disability in the short story "The Scarlet Ibis," published in 1960. In addition, after disclosing her personal experiences with her son's disability, Merritt learned that the character one of her students most identified with in *To Kill a Mockingbird* was Boo Radley because of the way that character was treated.

There are also several articles in *Disability Studies Quarterly (DSQ),* an online, open-access journal published by SDS (http://www.disstudies.org/), that list specific questions teachers can pose about literary texts. In their thought-provoking article "Questioning Representations of Disability in Adolescent Literature: Reader Response Meets Disability Studies," Valerie Struthers Walker, Tara Mileski, Dana Greaves, and Lisa Patterson pose questions designed to get students thinking critically about how characters with disabilities are depicted in selected adolescent or children's literature—and what those depictions tell us about our society. In her section of the jointly written essay, Walker uses the following questions to get students "to attend to the ways in which their understanding of literature and the world changes as they read, write and discuss their interpretations of literature." Her first question can generate a sophisticated reader response: "How do our own experiences and beliefs shape the meanings we make of representations of disability in texts?" Her second question can spark engaging research projects: "How can we draw on outside resources to help us read these texts, and our readings of these texts in new ways?" For the novel *Al Capone Does My Shirts,* by Gennifer Choldenko (one of the books reviewed in Letcher's column in this issue of *EJ*), Mileski poses the following question about Moose, the young male protagonist, and his sister Natalie, who seems to have symptoms of autism: "How does the way that Moose understands Natalie's 'difference' change throughout the text?" This is a higher-order question that goes beyond plot summary and character identification to inference and analysis. In discussing a YA mystery novel, *From Charlie's Point of View* by Richard Scrimger, Patterson asks her students about the main character, Charlie, who is blind and must solve a bank robbery case: "Scrimger includes scenes throughout the book in which Charlie is compared to (or, in some cases, contrasted with) 'everyone else.' How does this position readers to think about blindness and disability?" Patterson refers to Simi Linton's highly influential work in Disability Studies, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity.* She revisits Linton's questions regarding who gets to define normalcy, and she ends the essay with these questions: "Who is privileged when we label someone 'normal'? How is the text structured to raise this type of question?" In another essay in the same volume of *DSQ,* Caroline Leach and Stuart Murray examine representations of disability and gender in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and its film adaptation. As Murray points out, "The novel is excellent for beginning to think about the ways in which disability can be portrayed and discussed in relation to other social forms and processes."

Asking critical questions about how characters with disabilities are described in literature pushes students further, helping them develop more sophisticated inference skills as well as more enlightened views of disability.

Questions such as these from *English Journal, Disability Studies Quarterly,* or from some of the resources listed in #9, below, may be combined with more traditional questions regarding plot, theme, characterization, etc. Asking critical questions about how characters with disabilities are described in literature pushes students further, however, helping them develop more sophisticated inference skills as well as more enlightened views of disability.

4. Broaden definitions of "reading."

Nicole E. Green, who is blind in one eye and has limited eyesight in the other, used to listen to audio books in school. As she explains in her essay in this special issue, she often had to convince her teachers that hearing these novels was, indeed, reading them. If "reading" is defined narrowly as literally moving one's eyes across a text, then students who need to use their ears to read and students who can comprehend much better by hearing a text will continue to have to defend the modality that works best for them. But if reading is more broadly defined as paying close attention to content and interacting deeply with a text, then students who need audio texts could simply use them without stigma.

What if *all* students could access novels, short stories, textbooks, and other materials through both print *and* audio? With more texts available digitally and therefore able to be read aloud by increasingly sophisticated automated text readers, audio texts no longer present the expensive challenge they once did. Students who learn much better by listening than they do by reading might be spared having to prove this to their teachers. If everyone had access to such materials, there might be less resent-

ment by other students who may see audio texts as an unfair advantage not available to them. Furthermore, students who think they learn better through eyes-on-page reading might welcome the chance to multitask: to listen to their assigned readings through their iPod as they walk or ride the bus to school. They might find that doing so is an effective way to review material they've read off the page, to store it better in their brain, or to develop their listening skills. Since much writing in English language arts is in response to literary or other texts, how students access those readings—how often and how easily they can access them—is important.

We should, obviously, continue to teach students to develop their reading of print texts, if they are physically able to do so. I'm not suggesting that audio texts take the place of printed ones. However, audio texts can increase all students' interaction with the poems, stories, and novels we want them to read, and any exposure to books increases students' vocabulary and background knowledge, enabling them to comprehend increasingly complex material. And listening is also one of the English language arts.

There is an art to producing an artistic and high-quality audio text, as anyone knows who has listened to both well-read and poorly read audio texts from a local library. In fact, having students *produce* an audio text of a short story, novel, or poem is a challenging, collaborative assignment that requires deep knowledge of the text, finely tuned listening and speaking skills, technological knowledge, and the ability to work well with other members of the production team—all necessary skills in the 21st century and a great way to tap into different students' talents and to help them develop new ones.

In this issue, English educators Meadow Sherrill Graham and Sheila Benson describe how they had their preservice teachers interpret multimodal texts: TV shows, episode transcripts, and interviews with actors or directors. They also had them design lessons using multimodalities, so that their future students might escape print-bound assignments, so intellectually limiting for some students, with or without disabilities.

5. Broaden definitions of "writing."

New technologies have broadened our definitions of literacy and provided new ways of thinking about what our students can produce: videos, audio files, websites, and so on. Now that these new media have raised our collective consciousness about the role speaking, listening, and visual representation can play in a finished product, we are in a better position to rethink what role they might play in what Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee argue are underused canons, or categories, of ancient rhetoric: the first, *invention,* and the second, *arrangement.* Invention, of which modern "prewriting" is a part, was for the ancient rhetoricians a vast and detailed set of strategies for generating, reflecting on, and further developing ideas. Arrangement, of which modern print outlines and graphic organizers are a part, was for the ancients highly dependent on each rhetorical situation, including complex analyses of time and place—kairos—as well as whether the argument was to be presented to a friendly or hostile audience.

Not only are invention and arrangement still given short shrift in many of today's writing classes. Crowley and Hawhee argue further that there is the concomitant problem of overemphasis on the fifth canon of rhetoric: *delivery.* Too many of us still stress the correctness of the finished product to the exclusion of invention, arrangement, and style (the third canon of ancient rhetoric). Indeed, to judge by the complaints about other people's grammar that appear every day in newspapers, blogs, and podcasts, the general public seems to think that writing is all about, and only about, the correctness of a finished product. In these grammar rants (which Ken Lindblom and I are currently analyzing in a book, *Grammar Rants,* to be published by Boynton/Cook), the ranters frequently claim to be the last souls on earth who defend literacy. However, they never demand that schools teach more invention strategies, those higher-order intellectual tasks that ancient rhetoricians taught their students about finding and arranging the available means of persuasion best suited for each rhetorical situation. Rather, these defenders of literacy are content to rail about grammar or spelling.

It goes without saying that well-edited, meticulously proofread prose is something all writers should know how to produce. But real writers know that copyediting and proofreading are the last of many steps. If attempted too soon, they can interrupt fluency and interfere with higher-order generating and organizing thought processes. And real writers get to choose how they generate those ideas.

Some prefer longhand, others a beloved old typewriter, others word processing, others a storyboard, and still others use dictation or a voice/speech-recognition program.

If we want all students to be better writers, why can't we offer them the full range of composing choices that are available? Innovative approaches to generating and arranging are particularly important to students with language-related learning disabilities (LD), as is the opportunity to create multimodal products. For these students, the traditional academic reliance on writing is especially harmful during invention, because hand-writing or word-processing may not work for them (the way it might for their teachers) as an effective invention strategy. As Charles Lowe has argued, the "free-speaking" made possible by voice-recognition technology might provide a more effective composing tool for some students. For others, ideas might be arriving too fast for keyboarding to capture, or students may lose their train of thought as they search for cumbersome words. Another promising heuristic is the visually active storyboard, long a staple of screenwriters. For some people, the representation possible through a visual mode provides a wider idea path than does the paragraph. These multiple modalities are similar to what Paulo Freire called "multiple channels of communication" (50), used in his famous literacy programs in Brazil.

If we want all students to be better writers, why can't we offer them the full range of composing choices that are available?

For those of us who read *English Journal* and other resources to discover 21st-century technologies that we can add to those we already use, it may be easy to forget that many students are still taught writing primarily through 20th- and even 19th-century tools. At some schools, students are not even allowed to word process their work anymore. They are taken off computers and made to write their essays in cursive. Why? Because the essays on standardized exams must be handwritten, officials worry that students used to writing on computers will not do well when asked to handwrite on paper. So some students are not even allowed the speed and ease of revising and editing that a simple keyboard provides. We can make "writing" more accessible by expanding both what it means to learn to write (including more invention and arranging strategies) and the means through which students can generate and organize their ideas (using writing, sketching, and voice-recognition technology).

6. Use a wider variety of assessments.

Timed tests may be evaluating how quickly students can take a test rather than how much content the students know or how well they can analyze material or think critically. For most aspects of English language arts, speed is not the main objective. Many of us cherish leisurely reads or the chance to reread something. Writing in the real world proceeds at a different pace for everyone, and all real writers have at least some chance to revise their work. And since "more time on tests" is a frequent accommodation for those with learning disabilities in English classes, why not reevaluate the need to make all students except those with labels rush through? Give all students the time they need to do their best work.

Similarly, written tests may be evaluating how well a student writes rather than how much content the student knows, or how well he or she can synthesize or analyze material. Sometimes the purpose of the assessment is to measure writing ability, in which case a written test is required. But if the test is intended to measure knowledge of Shakespeare, or literary genres and elements, or critical thinking, or organizational knowledge, or reading comprehension, inference, or interpretation, there are other ways to find out what students know and can do. Yes, writing is a part of English language arts. But so are speaking, listening, and composing nonprint texts.

If some students' language-related disabilities mostly involve print, the exams they take may be assessing their processing of written test questions and their mastery of word processing or even handwriting, rather than what they know. For them, an oral exam might provide a more accurate measure of their content knowledge and higher-order analyzing abilities. For other students, the unfair advantage of always being able to use their preferred modality—writing—in testing situations may have the disadvantage of impeding their intellectual growth. *Too* comfortable, perhaps, with the *means* by which their knowledge is measured, they are de-

nied the challenge that working with ideas through different modalities could offer.

If more assessments were a mix of writing, speaking, and listening, we would need fewer special accommodations, more students could be tested using a modality in which they shine, and more students would be challenged to develop their skills in areas in which they need more practice (writing and speaking and listening). By rethinking the circumstances in which we ask all students to function, we might be able to create more humane conditions for test taking for everyone, at the same time we reduce the stigma of having to ask for special accommodations. Multiple assessments *raise* expectations. As Cynthia Messer points out in her article in this issue: "Having a variety of assessments will not undermine our high standards but rather provide more accurate ways for all students to show that they have accomplished these high goals" (40).

7. Bring the Principles of Universal Design into teaching.

Ron Mace, an educator, designer, and architect who founded The Center for Universal Design, defines Universal Design as "the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design" (http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/about_ud.htm). To give just one example: if a shower stall is designed from the beginning with wide doorways, grab bars, a recessed bench or fold-down seat, versatile shower sprays, etc., more people can bathe safely without having to retrofit everything if they injure themselves or develop disabilities as they age.

While the Principles of Universal Design apply mostly to the physical world of architecture and product design, its underlying philosophy can be, and already has been, applied to education and learning. See the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST; http://www.cast.org/about/index.html), founded in 1984, for ideas regarding classroom products and practices, curriculum development, etc. They list, as does The National Center for Universal Design for Learning (http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines), important guidelines that can be applied successfully in all disciplines, and they provide many examples of how these guidelines translate to the classroom. The main points, however, are that we need to present material in more than just one mode, that students should have more than just one way to learn material, to interact with it, and to be assessed on it.

In English classes, we typically ask students to read texts, engage with those texts in some way, and then write about them. There are many tools we can choose from, both high and low tech, to help stimulate the higher-order thinking we want students to do. There are sophisticated Web 2.0 tools: Audacity for voice responses, graphic-novel generating sites, film-making sites, Google Docs, wikis, and so on. In this *EJ* issue, Cheryl Gomes and James Bucky Carter discuss how students with reading difficulties became highly engaged in an authentic writing project: an interactive blog with Gene Luen Yang, author of the prize-winning graphic novel *American Born Chinese.* The blog and the novel both helped build community in this class, giving students insights on identity and the importance of being themselves. There are also simple low-tech tools we've had for years, which we can use in more imaginative ways once we think past what Cynthia L. Selfe calls "alphabetic-only composing" (616). Almost any activity that requires active participation from students will involve more than one modality: class debates, collaborative projects and presentations, electronic peer commentary through discussion board forums, and oral peer-response sessions. Students can also provide digitally recorded audio feedback to their classmates' drafts—once they've had some training in doing so. (See, for example, Julie Reynolds and Vikki Russell's research at Duke University for research results regarding that audio feedback.)

If more assessments were a mix of writing, speaking, and listening, we would need fewer special accommodations, more students could be tested using a modality in which they shine, and more students would be challenged to develop their skills in areas in which they need more practice (writing and speaking and listening).

Here are some other examples (which I explain in more detail in Chapter 3 of my book, *Talking, Sketching Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing*). In my classes, all students must

make a two-minute response to class readings on my office voicemail, and it can't simply be prepared ahead of time and read off the page. I must hear them thinking through their ideas, discovering connections and gaining insights *as they speak.* This is a welcome, stimulating experience for some students and a terrifying one for others—often some of the best writers. Some students send me MP3 files with their voiced responses, while others can barely manage the telephone technology. The point is, through such multimodal experiences, students' talents are both demonstrated and developed, remixed in ways that provide welcome opportunities to some and needed challenges to others.

Another way to have students engage with complex ideas is through visual representation. Most teachers are familiar with graphic organizers to help students organize their ideas. But having students actually sketch, graph, draw, or otherwise visually represent complex ideas they're reading about forces them to grapple with those ideas in challenging new ways. Here's how it works: After I've given an introduction to the assignment and distributed directions, each student comes to class with an individual sketch or drawing. Then I put them in groups of three or four, where they explain their sketch to one another and decide which representation they'll use as a group, or they may come up with a new one collaboratively. For example, graduate students in my Composition Theory class must create visual representations of material introduced in our readings. They must somehow juxtapose at least two abstract concepts important to composition or rhetorical theory. They might sketch traditional representative theories of language versus more postmodern views of how language shapes knowledge. They might show Freire's praxis of critical consciousness compared to banking-model approaches. They must then present their work to the class orally and also write a short explanation of it.

The preparation work students do in these small groups is critical because as they are deciding which sketch to use, they are talking through important concepts in the course. In a typical class of 25–30 students, logistics prevent every student from participating often in a lively discussion. In these groups of three or four, however, every student must verbalize these concepts, must listen to others explain their representation, and then, with the group, must finalize what they'll present to the class: who will actually come up with the sketch, who will write about it, who will talk about it in front of the class. I let them decide. This multimodal assignment both uses and develops different students' talents. It gets everyone engaged in important course content, and the most stimulating presentations help everyone understand something more thoroughly.

To grapple with these concepts, students may use stick figures, charts, graphs, geometric shapes, pipe cleaners, or differently shaped pretzels. Some use talk-show formats, videos, or even interpretive dance. I do not assess students on their artistic talents, but rather on the insight their representation offers and the extent to which it stimulates discussion. For these visual representations, it may be initially tempting for students to dash off simplistic drawings of course content. However, generating some shared criteria before they begin will prevent that. Before this project is due, we take a few minutes of class time to generate together possible criteria for assessing it, and I rough out a simple rubric they can consult as they put the finishing touches on their project. When students must identify, juxtapose, and visually represent abstract concepts in a way that will generate lively discussion, they *do* produce insight-producing creations, sometimes coming up with an original metaphor, which is, after all, often a concrete representation of an abstract concept. What's more, their minds work in different ways than when they write. Visual representation is a wild and wonderful invention strategy. For some, it taps into visual talents that are rarely exercised in English classes; for others, it is an astonishing discovery about what their brains can do when they wake up the neurons in both hemispheres.

8. Become more aware of how language shapes our perception of reality.

As Linton demonstrates in her important work in Disability Studies, language reveals much about perceptions of disability in our society. One way to help students become more conscious of word connotation and hidden assumptions in both literary and nonfiction texts is to help them examine how language functions to both shape and reflect a certain view of the world. Here is the headline and lead sentence I found in an Associated Press story on the front page of *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington/Normal, IL):

> **Court sets limit on disability law**
>
> Washington, D.C.—In a victory for employers, the Supreme Court made it more difficult for workers to demand special treatment when they suffer partial physical disabilities such as carpal tunnel syndrome. (January 9, 2002)

When I discuss the above authentic news lead with students, I put it next to a hypothetical lead that I wrote, changing just a few of the words:

> **Court sets limit on disability law**
>
> Washington, D.C.—In a loss for partially disabled workers, the Supreme Court made it more difficult for workers to ask for accommodations when they suffer partial physical disabilities such as carpal tunnel syndrome.

Without telling them which one is the real lead (the first one), I simply tell them that one is real and one is made up. I ask them about how each sentence frames the court decision differently ("In a victory for employers" versus "In a loss for partially disabled workers"). I ask about the different connotations of "demand" and "ask." I ask about the difference between "accommodations" and "special treatment." I ask what most Americans think of people who "demand special treatment." Most of the time I can simply ask, "How are these two leads different?"—and students find the differences. They see immediately the power of word connotation and hidden assumptions—even in so-called impartial writing, such as front-page news stories—and how powerful language can be in shaping our views of business, employers, and employees with disabilities. Students can do similar analyses of other texts: novels and short stories (discussed above), poetry, drama, news stories, letters to editors, public service announcements about disabilities, fundraising flyers, accounts of athletes with disabilities, and other nonfiction texts. What people say to or about people with disabilities can also be harmful. In this issue, Meredith Stewart describes how strangers' well-intentioned words concerning her physical disability can cause unintended pain.

9. Take advantage of the many disability-related resources available.

In addition to the resources named so far in this essay, here are just a few of many more, each one of which is itself a source of further resources:

Lewiecki-Wilson, Cynthia, and Brenda Jo Brueggemann, with Jay Dolmage. *Disability and the Teaching of Writing: A Critical Sourcebook.* Boston: Bedford, 2008. Print.

This is a wonderful collection of current thinking about disability: how disability intersects with teacher training, what it's like to be a teacher with a disability, resources for teachers, how to analyze language regarding disability, and activities to use with students. It also has an extensive bibliography.

Daniels, Harvey. "Are Literature Circles on Your IEP?" *Voices from the Middle* 12.4 (2005): 54–55. Print.

As Daniels argues in this essay, students with IEPs should not be denied the opportunities offered by literature circles. They, too, should be able to experience the authentic, book group–like discussion afforded their peers without IEPs: the guided choice of which novel to read, which role in the group they'd like to fulfill, and which ideas they'd like to explore in structured, higher-order discussions.

Disability Studies Quarterly: The First Journal in the Field of Disability Studies.

This scholarly journal is now open-access and available in html online at http://dsq-sds.org/issue/archive. While many of the articles are of interest primarily to scholars in Disability Studies, teachers interested in learning more about this interdisciplinary field will find this journal helpful. And, as mentioned above, the Vol. 28, No. 4 (2008) special issue, "Disability Studies in the Undergraduate Classroom," has a number of practical suggestions for using this theory in the teaching of English.

English Journal 84.8 (1995). (Special Issue on Multiple Intelligences)

Now 15 years old, this special issue of *English Journal* on multiple intelligence is full of good ideas for teaching English using multimodal approaches. Howard Gardner, author of the groundbreaking 1983 book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences,* wrote the lead article. Peter Smagorinsky, in "Multiple Intelligences in the English Class: An Overview," shows how Gardner's theories can be applied in English language arts. And Bruce Pirie, in his excellent article, "Meaning through Motion: Kinesthetic English," shows how to use movement to teach literary works such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies.*

Science Magazine.

This may seem like an odd resource for teachers of English. But we who ask our students to do so much reading and writing and thinking need to know more about what happens when people think—what brain research might be relevant to what we do. Much scientific research on language-related learning disabilities is controversial (see Chapter 1 in my book, *Learning Re-Abled,* for an account of that controversy), and much is outside what many may consider the boundaries of English. The social construction of disability has been clearly demonstrated through extensive research and scholarship in Disability Studies. At the same time, we must also follow neurological research on possible causes for language-based learning disabilities. Neuroscientists are themselves currently embroiled in a dramatic debate over test results on possible causes, and as English teachers, we need to follow these studies, even with their conflicting results, perhaps because of them. (For a quick overview of these studies, see editorials, book reviews, and letters to *Science Magazine* [Gabrieli; Meltzoff; Seidenberg; Skoyles and Skottun; Stern].)

Renino, Christopher. "'Who's There?': Shakespeare and the Dragon of Autism." *English Journal* 99.1 (2009): 50–55. Print.

A father and teacher tells us about how his son and his son's friend, both on the autism spectrum, become inspired by Shakespeare's plays and collaborate on their own original script. Although these two boys cannot yet speak, their sense of humor and rich intellectual lives are documented through use of keyboards and letter boards.

Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy 7.1 (2002).

This journal, also available online for free, has a special issue on disability: "Disability: Demonstrated by and Mediated through Technology." The articles in this issue give practical suggestions on teaching and also provide links to further resources. It is available at http://endora.wide.msu.edu/7.1/index.html.

Schwarz, Patrick. *From Disability to Possibility: The Power of Inclusive Classrooms.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2006. Print.

This is one of the best books I've ever used in my methods class for preservice English teachers. Both inspiring and practical, this short book improves the way English teachers think of inclusion.

AHEAD: Association on Higher Education And Disability (http://www.ahead.org/)

This is an invaluable site, with many links to articles, publications, discussion lists, videos and DVDs, special interest groups, and conferences. Comprehensive and easy to navigate, this site has information and resources for everyone regarding disability: technology, suggested films for discussion, career planning, and much more. This is their vision: "AHEAD envisions educational and societal environments that value disability and embody equality of opportunity."

10. Ask students how they learn best, and keep expectations high.

If any of this seems overwhelming right now, simply ask students how they learn best, or ask their parents. By the time they're in middle school or high school, many students with disabilities know much about what they need, specifically, to succeed. Parents, too, can be a rich source of information. In this issue, Carolyn Ariella Sofia writes about what she learned about her teaching during the year she taught her son at home. He taught her how to tap into students' talents to help them learn what they find challenging. Elizabeth Park Reid relates how one teacher saw her daughter's potential as a writer and nourished it, keeping expectations high. Also in this issue, Robyn Seglem and Melissa VanZant, an English teacher and a special education teacher, respectively, write about how they teamed up to have their students experience the true meaning of "least restrictive environment" (LRE). LRE is the federal requirement that students with disabilities receive their education, to the fullest extent possible, in the same classes with students who do not have disabilities. Using Socratic circles, a reading day, and a wiki, these two teachers found "ways to further every student's learning without watering down the curriculum" (46).

This Special Issue

As described throughout this "*EJ* in Focus" piece, the articles in this special issue are a mix of voices: teachers with disabilities, parents and teachers of children with disabilities, and selected passages written by students with disabilities. I am aware of James I. Charlton's admonition in his book *Nothing*

About Us Without Us about the danger of people without disabilities writing about people with disabilities. For too long, people with disabilities have been advocated for and written about, often without their perspectives. It is also important, however, that family members and teachers discuss what they have learned in their experiences, and to document and process the role disability plays in all our lives.

I am a former teacher of high school English. I've taught writing at a two-year college, a four-year liberal arts college, a Midwestern university, and now at a large East Coast university, where in addition to teaching composition and rhetoric, I help prepare preservice middle school and high school English teachers. I am not, currently, a person with a disability. I am, as they say, a TAB (Temporarily Able Bodied). However, if I live as long as I would like to, I may well acquire one or more disabilities, and quite frankly, if or when I do, I'd like our society to be a good deal more inclusive than it currently is, with many more accommodations already in place, with Principles of Universal Design having already convinced architects to routinely build ramps, elevators, wider doorways, grab bars, and so on. If my sight fails but I want to take a college course somewhere, I hope there is more than a printed text available, and I hope I won't have to convince the instructor that listening to an audio text is, indeed, reading. If my hearing fails, I hope he or she does more than lecture. If I have arthritis in my fingers, I hope no one will tell me that using voice-recognition technology isn't really writing.

What are some other problems with mainstream society's current view of disability? It can limit human potential, which is devastating to an individual. It also does permanent, invisible harm to society, which does not benefit from the intellectual insights, scientific discoveries, or even the taxable income of all its citizens. When we limit the inclusion of some of our students, we limit the potential of our entire society. Designing more physically, intellectually, and pedagogically inclusive English classes will help individuals reach their full potential, and society will benefit from the contributions of people formerly excluded.

I am deeply grateful to Ken Lindblom, editor of *English Journal,* for inviting me to guest edit this special issue on disability. It's been a privilege to learn so much from the contributors.

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On a Farm Outing

The only girl I've invited,
Jet suckles the half grown calves: one finger,
two fingers run with their slaver.
More calves nuzzle her wrists and jacket;
they butt and bang each other at the fence to be near
her dripping fingers.

I roll Jet's cuffs and stand behind her.

We watch the farm girl feed the calves from a teat
on the bottom of a pail. They know girls' hands,
their pet, poke and prod. She leads a calf
from the pen with a rope she's threaded through its mouth
and around its snout. It follows after her
with a frisky, colt-like prancing.

Jet-of-the-juicy-fingers wants to be the one
the calves love best. She lives with other half grown girls.
When I visit her, all the girls without
their mothers vie for my attention.
And they soon forget—full of who got more,
who has a pass to go outside.

It's hard to give girls what they want.

None of us pay any mind to the cows.
Separated from their calves
by wire and fence, they lie on their sides, bawling,
their bags and udders engorged.

—Elinor Cramer

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Elinor Cramer's poems have appeared in *Stone Canoe, The Comstock Review,* and elsewhere. Her book of poems, *She Is a Pupa, Soft and White,* will be published by Word Press next year. Elinor has an MFA in creative writing from Warren Wilson College. She lives and practices psychotherapy in Syracuse, New York.

Meredith Stewart

Doubly Vulnerable: The Paradox of Disability and Teaching

A teacher with a physical disability develops honesty and pedagogical strength from her experience with students; they all learn important lessons about the value of vulnerability.

When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. . . . To be alive is to be vulnerable.
—*Madeleine L'Engle,* Walking on Water

The girl in the green cape walks onto the makeshift stage.

"ShShShe didn't practice it this way," a teacher sputters. The other teachers turn to me with eyes that ask, "What should we do?" It takes a moment for my own eyes and brain to connect. I realize it's not the cape that has their attention.

Students have gathered to perform skits to illustrate ways of being a good friend. They have portrayed teachers in other skits, but Piera, the girl in the green cape, has gone further than other students in her depiction. Other students had simply been addressed as the teacher in the skit, but Piera has tucked her arm up into her sleeve, exposing her elbow in an approximation of my missing hand. *Oh, she's pretending to be me,* I realize.

It feels as if all eyes in the room are on me, waiting to see if I am upset with Piera for copying my physical appearance. I throw my head back and laugh because I know Piera's sense of humor. This is imitation as flattery, not mockery. The tension eases and the skit continues.

There are other professions I might choose where others would not notice that I was born without a hand or at least be restrained enough by adult social mores not to mention it. Yet, it is in the classroom, filled with vulnerable adolescents, that I feel most myself. For me, the classroom is a place of paradox, grace, and vulnerability. My experiences in the classroom lead me to more fully live into the person I imagine I am becoming. Teaching and learning along with students who are discovering who they are have given me the opportunity to consider how my vulnerabilities affect who I am as a teacher and a person. It has also given me the opportunity to model for students how they might approach the challenges of their own lives.

Vulnerability and the Paradox of Disability

Parker Palmer's comment that teaching is a "daily exercise in vulnerability" might just as easily be said about living with a disability (17). As much as the person with a disability might want to hide his or her differences, it is often difficult to do so. Something as commonplace as walking through a grocery store without being stared at is often impossible for a person missing a hand.

People often want to "fix" those who are disabled or different, usually by creating some narrative to make themselves feel better about the person's situation. Gwynneth VanLaven, a journalist who walks with a cane as a result of being struck by a car, has described disability as "vulnerability incarnate." This kind of vulnerability can be upsetting and leads many to offer her health advice or consolation, at least partly out of a desire to feel they are not powerless in the face of human tragedy

or frailty. Strangers regularly say to me, "You do so well for someone with one arm," or "You must have been made special for a reason." I am certain that their intentions are good, but comments such as these strike me as attempts to reassure themselves as much as me. The irony is that in calling attention to my disability and offering pat suggestions, they are actually accomplishing the opposite of what they hope.

In contrast to these attempts to "make things better," Palmer argues that teachers should not be about the business of fixing, but of understanding. Of those parts of us that we perceive to be broken, he writes, "the point is not to 'get fixed' but to gain deeper understanding of the paradox of gifts and limits, the paradox of our mixed selves, so that we can teach, and live, more gracefully within the whole of our nature" (74). As much as I might hope for quick fixes to my inadequacies as a teacher or to the problems my students face, temporary bandages do nothing to address the deeper issues. While it might be more comfortable for me to merely reassure a student that everything will be OK, there is ultimately more value in my listening carefully and thoughtfully to his or her story.

The kind of grace O'Connor names is not the easy grace of cherubic voices singing peaceful lullabies. Instead, it is a startling, mischievous grace that changes us by giving us visions we did not necessarily seek. As a teacher, accepting that kind of grace means considering that students' views of us may provide us some insight into ourselves.

It was my students who began to give me the gift of understanding, to help me see the ways my disability was simply a part of who I am. I've realized that acknowledging my disability is a part of developing integrity, the process Palmer defines as "becoming more real by acknowledging the whole of who I am" (14). As much as I might wish to escape the limits and vulnerabilities of my body, they are a part of me.

Being disabled has given me a great deal of practice looking and feeling different. I know intimately the kind of self-consciousness that comes with not having your body as you might wish it to be, which so often is a part of adolescence. As adults it is sometimes easy to dismiss the concerns of teenagers. *Why do they spend hours in front of the mirror? Why do they think people are staring at them?* Whenever someone stares slack-jawed at me or points, I try to pause for a moment and remind myself that this is what it feels like to be different. I don't claim this makes me able to feel what my students feel, but it does keep me in touch with the kind of thinking that makes a teenager believe a zit may, indeed, signal the end of life as he or she knows it.

Life as embodied creatures makes us vulnerable. Henry D. Thoreau's reflection, "there is nothing so strange to me as my own body," would make the perfect bumper sticker for the vulnerabilities of adolescence or disability (417). My students feel this vulnerability in the ways their bodies are beginning to change and their growing awareness that their bodies may not match societal standards of beauty. For me, the strangeness comes in occasionally forgetting about the hand that I was born without and then the jarring reminder that I look different from nearly everyone else.

To be a disabled teacher is to be doubly vulnerable. My physical vulnerability is immediately perceptible—the first thing, I suspect, many notice about me. As a teacher, I harbor other, more hidden, imperfections—the need to perfect, the need to control, feelings of inadequacy, and impatience. It is so tempting to "play a masked professional role, pretending outwardly that I have no tensions at all while inwardly all those tensions I pretend not to have are ripping apart the fabric of my life" (Palmer 89–90). My students have forced me to confront these imperfections and tensions. When a beautifully prepared lesson falls apart and a student says, "Ms. Stewart, I don't think this is working," I want to snap back, "Well, whose fault is that?" But on days when I am willing to be vulnerable, I can say, "I think you're right. Any ideas about how we could make it better?" These daily encounters with students shape me as a teacher. Seriously acknowledging students' questions about what and how we are learning help me think more deeply and creatively about my teaching. They inform the self-reflection I believe is a critical part of growing as a teacher.

To be vulnerable in these less-obvious imperfections can be a challenge, but as Ranier Maria Rilke wrote to an aspiring poet, "they are difficult things with which we have been charged; almost everything serious is difficult" (27). There are days

on which it would be easy to ignore a student's question or challenge because it is not exactly where I intended to go with the lesson or it asks more of me than I am willing to give. By creating a space where the difficult questions can be asked, even if there are no easy answers, and the truth can be told, I hope to help students have the opportunity to discover themselves, even as they are helping me discover myself. This means having conversations about how students are growing—as readers, writers, thinkers, and human beings—and the discomfort those changes can bring.

Disorientating Grace

Our students hold a mirror up to us in their comments and reactions. What we see there can make us uncomfortable. Teachers can choose to see these moments as challenges to their authority, uncomfortable intrusions on a part of themselves they would prefer not to acknowledge in the classroom, or moments in which an invitation is offered to see ourselves differently. In these moments, we are held captive in what Flannery O'Connor calls a space "in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected" (118). The kind of grace O'Connor names is not the easy grace of cherubic voices singing peaceful lullabies. Instead, it is a startling, mischievous grace that changes us by giving us visions we did not necessarily seek. As a teacher, accepting that kind of grace means considering that students' views of us may provide us some insight into ourselves.

During graduate school, I tutored students at a local elementary school. One day I stuck my head into the room, caught the eye of the teacher, and ducked back out to wait for the student I was tutoring. As I waited outside the door, I heard one of the other kindergartners ask the girl I tutored, "Why does your tutor only have one hand?" I held my breath and waited for the answer. The girl responded, "She was born that way. She's teaching me how to read. I bet you wish you had a tutor like her." Seconds later, she appeared in the threshold of the door and said, "Let's go. Can I hold your little arm?" I grinned and nodded.

An adult might have offered a long, fumbling explanation to try to answer the other child's question. The little girl's words took me aback because of how plainspoken they were. For her, my disability was not a matter that necessitated embarrassment or discomfort. I had one hand and that was part of who I was, but it was only a part. Like the characters in O'Connor's short stories, comments such as the girl's bring shocking grace, grace in the form of disruption and disorientation, grace that forces me to look more closely at the truth that is not as clean as I would like. Even after years of explaining why I look the way I do, I struggle to match the honesty and nonchalance of her explanation.

Recently, a discussion began in an online teacher community about whether children with learning and physical disabilities should be called disabled or gifted or differently-abled. As I read the threads, I oscillated from anger to confusion. I felt I, of all people, should have some insightful response. The conversation was fraught with all sorts of issues and layers of meaning, but what I was most struck by was the intensity of my reaction to it. This anger and confusion, the need to define who I am in relationship to my body or need to define who my students are in relationship to their bodies, rarely arises explicitly in my classroom. It's not a space where differences are ignored, but it's also not a space where they come to represent the whole of my understanding of myself or students' understanding of me. I hope that we have also created a place in which students don't feel their bodies represent the totality of themselves.

For her, my disability was not a matter that necessitated embarrassment or discomfort.

In "The Opportunity of Adversity," Aimee Mullins, a bilateral amputee, talks about how a doctor reshaped the "awful, daily occurrence" of physical therapy for her. During a particularly difficult therapy session, he said, "Wow! You are such a strong and powerful little girl!" and offered to give her $100 if she could break one of the resistance bands. For Mullins, her encounter with her doctor reshaped her reality and was an "example of how adults in positions of power can ignite the power of a child." The reverse has been true for me. My students have reshaped my vision of myself.

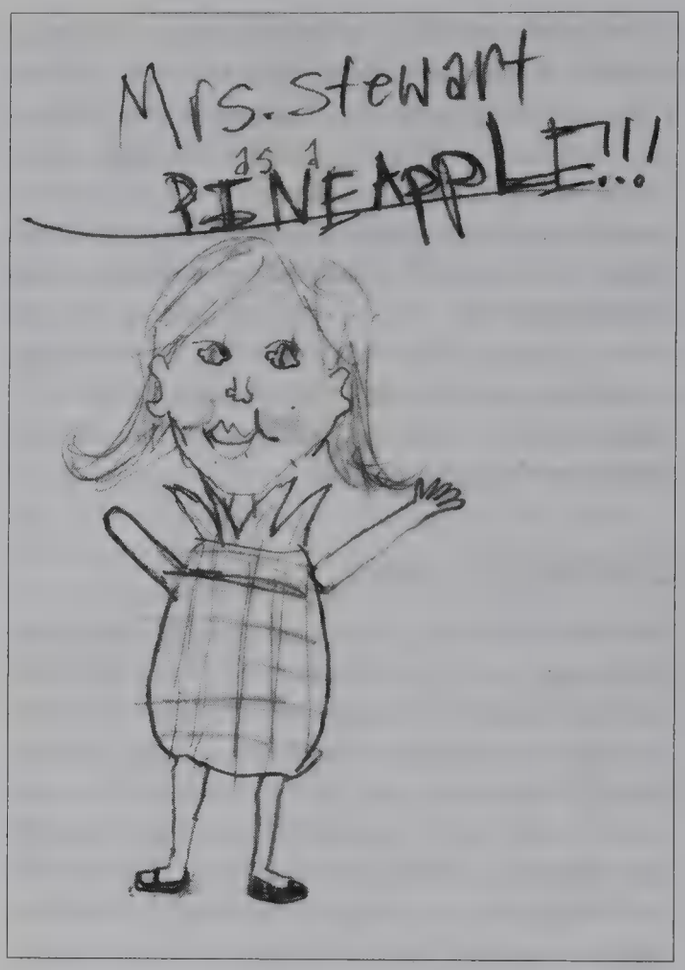
In the last week of my first semester of teaching, a student asked me what my favorite fruit was. "Um . . . pineapple," I answered distractedly and

went back to whatever was at hand. A few minutes later, Julia came back up to my desk with a drawing of a woman with a pineapple for a body. As she handed me the drawing she said, "Ms. Stewart—you're as strong as a rock and as sweet as a pineapple." The woman's arms, one with a hand and the other ending just past the elbow, were flung victoriously above her head.

My students have challenged me to acknowledge both my physical and pedagogical weaknesses. Openly and honestly discussing these weaknesses (whether perceived or actual) is not always easy, but doing so lets students know that vulnerability is not limited to the sometimes difficult years of adolescence.

I caught my breath, almost gasping. It was a posture I almost never adopted except in the classroom when someone had made a thoughtful point or come to some realization. Out in the world, I was much more likely to shove my arm into a vest pocket. The drawing looked strange to me, but I also recognized it as the person I secretly hoped I might be. The woman in the drawing was confident and lacked self-consciousness. I thanked Julia. Sometimes our students see us better than we see ourselves.

As teachers it can be tempting to imagine ourselves as monarchs of our classrooms, unwilling to cede our weaknesses lest we also cede our authority. My students have challenged me to acknowledge both my physical and pedagogical weaknesses. Openly and honestly discussing these weaknesses (whether perceived or actual) is not always easy, but doing so lets students know that vulnerability is not limited to the sometimes difficult years of adolescence. As an adult, one need not have a disability to practice this kind of vulnerability. All teachers have areas of vulnerability that we can benefit from sharing and discussing with students. This doesn't mean making the totality of our personal lives or pedagogy fodder for student scrutiny, but it does mean openness to honest conversations with students. The willingness to see our students' challenges to us as opportunities for growth and conversation, rather than threats, allows us to model for them the ways in which the challenges of their own lives can be opportunities for growth and reflection.



Julia's tribute to her teacher: "Ms. Stewart—you're as strong as a rock and as sweet as a pineapple."

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Kathleen D. De Mers

"The Brain within Its Groove"[1]: Language and Struggling Students

What practices and labels are themselves disabling? How can new technologies help stretch concepts of "normal"?

Words are the foundation of literacy. Words can express, in part, the joys, loves, triumphs, and sorrows of life. One person's thoughts, expressed through words, can powerfully influence and inspire audiences or readers and long outlive their author.

But not everyone is enamored of words. For some students, words are a kind of torture. For them language, and therefore school, presents a constant, insurmountable obstacle from the time they step into their first classroom, its walls festooned with letters, words, and numbers. If putting characters together to make words mystifies some young children, reading and writing with competence intensifies the tedious battle for these students in the middle school and high school years.

How can middle school and high school teachers help students who have difficulties learning to read and write well? This question has always demanded attention, and it seems that recently there are more ideas, studies, and tools to address this issue than ever before. First, teachers already recognize that there are differences in how individual students perceive and use language, but we can be more supportive of those differences, some of which may be an unrecognized advantage. Some students might have visual, auditory, or sensory insights that people good with words might overlook. Second, the way people get to know one another and have a chance to learn from one another is important because those factors help determine society's concept of "normal," a concept that needs to be stretched to include more people. Finally, advances in technology can provide practical support for all students, especially those who struggle in school.

People and Language Perception

Most likely, the readers of *English Journal* have a happy and productive relationship with words. They love reading them, speaking them, and teaching about them. One of the great masters of words, Emily Dickinson, surely meant to convey this relationship when she said, "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry" (qtd. in Higginson).

Even for gifted writers and speakers, knowledge does not have a one-to-one correspondence to words. Try to explain how we recognize a friend's voice on the phone as soon as she says hello. Explain how teachers can scan the crowd in a high school gym and in minutes spot their own students, recognize the ones they taught in prior years, and perhaps even recognize students from prior decades. Could the knowledge that enables these feats be transferred to someone else in poems, paragraphs, or bulleted lists?

What if the words themselves present impediments to their meaning? For me, reading Donald E. Lyman's *Making the Words Stand Still* was like having a translation of what it *feels like* to have language be a difficult obstacle rather than a delightful extension of daily life—what it *feels like* to be "learning disabled." His book is a bridge between a world

full of life and sensations, but few words and little need for them, and a world made richer with words—the world as I know it. This longtime special education teacher, mystified and frightened by school as a child, fought a brave battle for his own literacy. He relates an early encounter with school as a young student in the 1940s. After he describes raising and lowering the lid of his desk, listening to its creaks, carving into it with his pencil, filling its pencil slot with eraser bits, and even sinking his teeth into it, he is dismayed by his teacher's demand: "Lyman, leave that desk alone" (26).

We need to not be "other." It's one thing to recognize special needs and address them in school. It's another to allow a disability to define someone's presence in his or her community.

Lyman writes: "In my wordless world, all that I encountered was real, for I encountered the concreteness of the object rather than its symbolic name. Even people were concrete to me. I remembered them better by their faces, gestures, gaits, clothing, eyes, expressions, colors, odors, and voices than by name. Even today I remember the faces, eyes, gaits, and scents of teachers that I liked, but I cannot recall their names" (26). Here is his description of his childhood, which he describes as joyful and full of sensations, but in which he "functioned without words."

> My childhood affinity to the concrete realness of a concrete world was, I am sure, an innate trait that all of us possess to some degree. I had more of it than most. And I feel that this very fact contributed to the difficulty that I had in crossing the invisible boundary into the symbolic world. . . . From the very first, I felt strange in this world—uncomfortable, disoriented, homesick, threatened, and afraid. When it came to symbols (and in this world it always did), my nerves were not suited, my eyes were not adjusted, my ears were not tuned, my muscles were not fitted, my brain was not receptive, and my mind was not interested. (28)

He describes himself and students with learning disabilities in school as "concrete creatures caught up in a wordy world" (28). As a child, this Phi Beta Kappa adult scored a 72 on a fourth-grade IQ test (12). After a long struggle with words—"I gave all my life to overcoming my own 'Dumbo' self-image" (14)—he became a successful teacher and author.

How can a teacher in the 21st century help students who feel similar disorientation, even fear, in school to thrive? As students fall further behind with each passing year, their options become fewer and their distress more acute. Somehow their confidence, creativity, willingness, and ability to mine and express their thoughts must be nurtured, or those emerging qualities will be unintentionally starved.

It's Important to Be Normal

Feeling unsuited, maybe even unworthy, struggling students need to belong, to feel welcomed, so they can experience the joy of learning. Many people strive to excel, to go further than their peers, to be the best. Other people would give anything just to be viewed as normal or average, as unremarkable as a single dandelion in a field full of them. This drive is especially strong in adolescence. We naturally think of ourselves as normal until something occurs that causes us to reconsider this assumption.

Once, when my children were in school, I accompanied a class of young special education students on a field trip to a local playland. It had a small train, tiny rollercoaster, and a merry-go-round. I had many happy memories of going there myself as a child. In the train station, there was a sign that said parents ride free with children ages five and under, but parents would need their own ticket to ride with older children. We all settled into a seat, the school staff and the students. I sat with one of the children and got two tickets ready for the conductor.

But as the conductor approached the first seat, occupied by a child and one of the teachers, the teacher turned around and, waving her hand back to indicate the passengers on the train behind her, yelled out, "These children are all handicapped—they need an adult to accompany them." The young conductor's gaze swept over all of us. Before this announcement, we were just another trainful of little kids along with some big people waiting for our tickets to be collected, but now we were something else. The conductor looked us over. "Well, OK," she said.

It was bad enough that these eager kids were already being singled out in school, taught in "self-

contained" classrooms. But now it seemed they wouldn't be allowed to be normal even in a playground. Was the teacher a cruel person? I'm sure not. Perhaps she meant to conserve tickets so the children could enjoy a few more rides. Maybe she felt they were owed the privilege of having their chaperones ride free, under the circumstances.

But imagine that you are a seven-year-old sitting on that train, waiting for the fun to begin, when you are reminded by an adult's loud announcement that you aren't like other children. You can't ride this rinky-dink train all by yourself or with just your friend. Even though you're seven, they are treating you like a little four-year-old. Why is that? What's different about you?

As I sat there among the small children and their big guardians on the playground train, it seemed to me that school itself could pose some problems if well-meaning people could casually toss out such descriptions of our little group. It didn't bode well for the children's acceptance in school. Or, to put it more ominously, their acceptance was assured, but only with a label.

We need other people and want to be accepted by them. We learn how to be "normal" from our friends, the give-and-take of growing up in our community. We need to not be "other." It's one thing to recognize special needs and address them in school. It's another to allow a disability to define someone's presence in his or her community. Young people, accustomed to seeing and interacting with people with diverse physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities, learn to take these differences in stride.

My two sons are three years apart in age, and my younger son and I were often at his brother's school to visit for parties or other special occasions. In the wing of the school where his classroom was, there were many students in wheelchairs, or with braces, or being helped down the hall by a teacher. My two-year-old son understood that walking was harder for some people than for others.

One morning, we were walking through a parking lot on our way into a department store. A man came haltingly out of the automatic doors and made his way in our direction, struggling with a large bag and using the two metal braces on his arms to carry his body forward over the curb and into the lot in our direction. His progress was excruciatingly slow and wobbly. My son stared at him, his head turning in obvious wonder until the man was nearly at my elbow. I prepared myself to be mortified by whatever comment this two-year-old seemed about to produce. Then he announced loudly, "Mommy, that man—that man—that man—is chewing gum!"

To his eyes, the gum was the outrageous thing about the man with the braces—because in his young life he was accustomed to seeing people getting around with braces, but he wasn't allowed to chew gum.

Sometimes, just by introducing the unusual into a child's world, that thing becomes unremarkable. If all young children were accustomed to seeing people with all forms of disability as part of life everywhere, perhaps disability wouldn't be stigmatized the way it often is now.

Taking Advantage of Technology

Technology is not a small thing in the lives of people living with disabilities. It can stretch the boundaries of normal access to include them. Each year new technology offers teachers more opportunities to put literacy within reach for more students with disabilities, and for typical students who may simply be more interested and learn better when the studied content is available in multiple formats. When used appropriately, this common feature is a welcome labor-saving addition for everyone. For those students especially challenged by the mysterious arrangement of letters making up words (let's see, is that *able* or *ible?*), spell checkers are an indispensable assistant.

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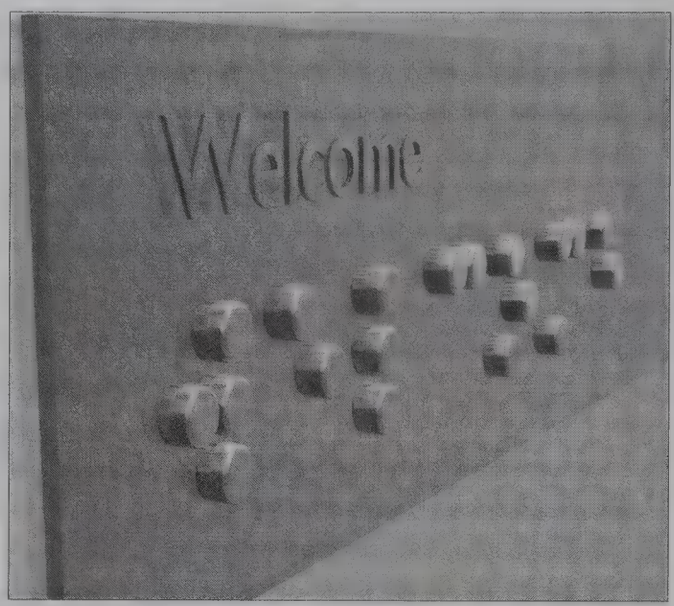
Audio books and online recordings make great books accessible to reluctant and eager readers alike. They let busy people read books during the forced leisure their drives to work afford them each day—*page-turners* they might never have had the time to explore in the traditional format that term implies.

Text-to-speech programs allow a story to read itself, and many can be set to highlight the word or sentence being read aloud by a voice of the reader's choice. For those of us who can easily decode the



"Welcome" written in English and Braille. © iStockphoto.com/ Stephan John

words on the page, text to speech might not seem terribly impressive. But to someone who for any reason cannot easily read printed text without someone else's help, this feature helps to level the field between those who cannot read (or see) well and those who can. It can help struggling readers improve and give readers with visual disabilities access to news and other information as soon as it's available online, without their having to process it through Braille texts or scanning and optical character recognition software.

One of my sons had difficulty reading. It was the late 1990s, and I found a free text-to-speech application developed by the Hawaiian Education Literacy Project (HELP). I set it up to highlight one line of text at a time and called my son into the room. He stood looking over my shoulder at the screen as I called up one of his favorite webpages and started up the speech engine. Immediately a slightly robotic voice started reading the Transformer stories some enterprising college student had posted on his website. My son shoved me out of the way (gently) and slid into the chair. Four hours later I came in to persuade him to take a break. He said, "Mom, this is the first time I could read it by myself."

Closed captioning allows poor readers to practice their skills and expand their vocabulary both in and out of the school environment.

Other, now common technologies can enhance what students learn in English language arts. In recent years, some popular, portable electronic readers (Kindle, iPhone) can download books and read them aloud. Students texting each other whenever they feel the urge might be inappropriate in class (and certainly while driving!), but they are instantly transmitting their thoughts to someone else via written language, however abbreviated or recycled, and this can help students develop confidence and fluency with written texts. Facebook provides an instant, mobile forum for over 500 million people worldwide sharing pictures, videos, dialogue, and links. Privacy issues aside, it encourages interactive communication on a scale that pen pals of the last century could never imagine.

Closed captioning allows poor readers to practice their skills and expand their vocabulary both in and out of the school environment. The ubiquitous YouTube has made it easy to add translatable closed captioning to videos, making the clips searchable on the Web, accessible to people who cannot hear, do not have speakers or earphones for their computers, or who speak a different language. Students enacting a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* can record the video, add captioning to their clip, and enable people with hearing impairments to enjoy the work. Seeing the text along with the video enactment might also help all students new to Shakespeare better understand the Elizabethan English dialogue.

Often technologies that are developed to address the particular needs of people with disabilities wind up making life better for other people who may not need them, but who can gain much from using them. (Common physical examples are wide bathroom stalls, sidewalk curb cuts, and accessible doorways and ramps.) Concepts of universal design and multiple methods of presenting material can strengthen the learning environment and make our schools more successful. These methods can benefit all students, including those with disabilities, learning differences, short attention spans, behavioral issues, and those learning English.

The National Center for Accessible Media is a good source for teachers hoping to take full advantage of digital media. NCAM's "Accessible Digital Media Guidelines" include details on educational issues for students with disabilities and descriptions of some types of assistive technologies, as well as accessibility tips. For example, teachers preparing homework assignments or online tutorials or stu-

dents working on how-to sessions for their classmates commonly provide illustrative images or videos; the NCAM guidelines point out that these materials are more accessible when "documentation and on-line help can be understood independent of graphics. Text descriptions should stand on their own." We should, then, have it both ways: in our eagerness to take advantage of the ease and low cost of taking our own photos and videos, we should not stop using the simple power of succinct text.

The Center for Applied Special Technology promotes Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which attempts to answer the question, "How can teachers respond to individual differences?" UDL "mirrors the universal design movement in architecture and product development, which calls for designs that from the outset consider the needs of the greatest number of possible users, eliminating the need for costly, inconvenient, and unattractive adaptations later." Universal Design for Learning's three primary principles, as related by CAST, are the following:

- *Multiple means of representation,* to give diverse learners options for acquiring information and knowledge;
- *Multiple means of action and expression,* to provide learners options for demonstrating what they know;
- *Multiple means of engagement,* to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation.

(For information on UDL in the elementary classroom, see "Yes They Can: Special Needs Students and 21st Century Literacies" in the April 2010 issue of NCTE's *School Talk.*)

Finally, science holds great promise for education. By working through carefully calibrated brain exercises developed in the field of neuroscience, students can increase their brains' processing power to strengthen their language and reading skills. Research in brain plasticity (the brain's ability to change throughout life) demonstrates that students with certain kinds of language learning difficulties can make significant gains in language development when their rate of acoustic processing is gradually increased through auditory-based remediation programs (Tallal 2404; Tallal and Gaab 386).

Like those wider doors that make it easier for more people to enter buildings unassisted, advances in learning methods and the concept of universal design can lead more students to literacy. It's encouraging to think that by acknowledging and investigating the mysterious phenomenon that is language learning and taking advantage of science and technology, we can help students succeed in achieving the education they need in our modern world, ever-changing and awash in words.

Note:

1. The quote in the title of this article is taken from Emily Dickinson, "The Brain within Its Groove," available at http://www.bartleby.com/113/1026.html.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The above article provides many suggestions for making classroom resources more accessible for all students, including adding closed captioning to video or audio so students may get the information in more than one mode. "Hints about Print," a ReadWriteThink.org student interactive, adds written word to the spoken text for more accessibility. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/hints-about-print-30025.html

Cynthia Messer

Parenting a Child with Special Needs: A Teacher's Journey toward Discovery about Disability and Identity

This parent and teacher describes two classroom activities, stressing the importance of having hig expectations for all students.

Several years ago, in the roots of my teaching career, I was consumed with reading research papers, creating innovative lesson plans, and grading, grading, and more grading—all activities to which I'm sure most *EJ* readers can certainly relate. While today these activities still fill my time, now my days are marked more by dismantling and reassembling a wheelchair, programming an augmentative communication device, and carrying my 50-plus-pound seven-year-old from bed to table to wheelchair to walker. Today, much of my "scholarly" work involves practicing physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy skills; teaching basic reading strategies; and attending Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, this time on the other side of the teacher's desk. Nearly seven years ago, when I found myself with a child with disabilities, I could not foresee how this would change my life: my daily habits, my perspective on many aspects of life, and ultimately my teaching practice itself. On this journey, I have developed an appreciation for the light that disability has cast on my identity, my son's identity, and my students' identities.

Disability and Personal Identity

Certainly, my firsthand experience with disabilities has changed my identity. I am a mother of a child with special needs. That truth is written all over me—in the muscles I've developed from lifting specialty equipment; in the slower gait that I maintain so that he can keep up with me while we're in a store; even in the blue placard hanging from my rearview mirror. A disability, or, in my case, parenting a child with disabilities, marks me. We use words such as *special* to refer to the person with a physical or mental limitation, but every person is indeed special—unique—with innate abilities in some areas and weaknesses in others. Perhaps the way my personal identity has changed the most since my son entered my life is that I recognize the disabilities we all have, and he helps me to be continually grateful for every ability that I possess. I am grateful that I can walk and talk without technology to assist me. I am thankful that I had the ability to succeed as a student to pursue my dreams to teach others. Conversely, I can now see more clearly my own disabilities, not ones that would elicit a diagnosis or an IEP, but areas where I naturally struggle. And I recognize that every one of my students has a unique set of talents and challenges, strengths and weaknesses, abilities and, dare I say, disabilities that defines him or her.

A New Understanding of Disability and Identity

Because of the unique makeup of each individual, I now see every ability and disability as a part of the person as a whole. This was not always the case. I used to pride myself on my ability to remain blind to students' disabilities. When, for instance, a student with spina bifida rolled into my classroom, I tried to make sure I treated him like any other stu-

dent, even if that meant no special privileges. When I taught one eighth grader who missed several classes due to his cystic fibrosis, I held him to the same standards as every other student, even if that meant he lagged behind. And when I modified my spelling tests according to the IEP for one student with learning disabilities, I did so begrudgingly, not realizing that I had failed to provide the necessary support for her to reach her potential. In each of these instances, I tried to separate my students' disabilities from their identities and simply ignored the disability itself, and I believed at the time that this was the right approach to take as a teacher.

Now, however, I see disability and identity in a new light. While some may think it is noble to be blind to disabilities, to maintain high standards, and to treat all students the same, I believe it does a student a disservice to ignore his or her disabilities altogether, for to do so is to deny a part of his or her identity. I learned this from watching my son. While I don't want him to be defined by his disability, one can't and shouldn't ignore it. His chair having almost become an extension of his body, it is now a part of his identity—not the whole of it, but a significant aspect of who he is. To acknowledge his disability is to affirm his determination and tenacity in the face of struggle and to appreciate his friendly, fun-loving demeanor that breaks down natural social barriers.

My New Perspective in the Classroom

Because I now see disability as an aspect of identity, I no longer desire to pretend that disabilities don't exist in my classroom. Rather than trying to remain blind to students' disabilities, I now wish to see each student as a whole person, with whatever abilities he or she brings to my class. I think this means, first of all, that I must seek to understand any particular disability a student may have. While I have a newfound grasp of what it is like to live life from a wheelchair and to use sign language and augmented devices to communicate, I still need to be a student of the challenges other disabilities bring with them. Just in the last two years, I have had the opportunity to teach a student with a visual impairment, a student with a chronic illness, a student with severe test anxiety, a student with dyslexia, and a student with ADD. With each of these students, I have been reminded that as a teacher, I am also ever a student. Each of these students has had something to teach me about his or her disabilities and how best to adapt my techniques and expectations to students' specific needs. These important lessons have improved my craft as a whole as I continually learn the most effective practices for my classroom.

Beyond these individual lessons, I have learned from my son some general "rules" for teaching that I wish to implement in my classes and that I wish for other teachers to practice when working with him as well as with others with disabilities:

- Don't underestimate any students. This may be the most important lesson that I have learned. I have seen my son rise to meet high expectations; conversely, I have seen him sacrifice his independence or fail to practice self-control simply because an adult did not think him capable of it. If we do not have high enough expectations for our students with disabilities, we will do them a disservice.
- Praise all students for their victories. I now have a much better understanding of how difficult living with a disability can be. It can make even the simplest task something challenging, daunting, and at times impossible. That is why we need to recognize the challenges students have overcome and acknowledge their accomplishments, even the small ones.
- See things from students' perspectives as much as possible. Students with disabilities face issues with their environment—physical, emotional, and social. We need to analyze our classrooms and curricula with an eye for accessibility, social concerns, frustration levels, and personal interests.

I have seen my son rise to meet high expectations; conversely, I have seen him sacrifice his independence or fail simply because an adult did not think him capable of it. If we do not have high enough expectations for our students with disabilities, we will do them a disservice.

- Teach the entire class about dealing with disabilities. All students need to see each individual as a whole person, and they need to learn how best to help without taking away their classmate's independence or personal responsibility. We need to seize the teachable moments that naturally occur when we have students with disabilities in our classrooms.

Assignments to Encourage Discovery and an Understanding of Disability and Identity

In the past few years, I have used a couple of writing activities that can aid any teacher or student in self-discovery by considering people who are not exactly like themselves. The first activity is a writing assignment that I call Other Voices. In preparation for this essay, I tell students that they must interview someone who has a life experience different from theirs. In class, we discuss what that means, first by brainstorming two lists: one where they list personal characteristics such as physical descriptions, family background, and socioeconomic status; another where they list examples of characteristics that are different from their own. Once they have created their lists, they then need to think of actual people who fit in their "different life experience" column in at least one aspect. Consider the following example lists:

All students need to see each individual as a whole person, and they need to learn how best to help without taking away their classmate's independence or personal responsibility.

My Life Experience	A Different Life Experience
Female	Male
Caucasian	African American, Asian American
Protestant	Muslim, Hindu, atheist
Nuclear family	Single-parent family, blended family

A student with this example list may have a few names of individuals that come to mind or will at least know where to begin the search. In this brainstorming session, I always remind my students to consider putting specific physical or mental disabilities in the second column where appropriate.

The next step in the process is to conduct the interview with the chosen person. I tell my students that this is an essay about discovery and that they will be most successful if they interview a person with whom they do not have a close relationship. I then teach a series of minilessons that focus on respect for an interviewee:

- **Interviewing**—Respect demands preparation (setting up the interview, generating questions), professionalism (timeliness, appearance), and reflection (highlighting key quotes from the interview, summarizing data).
- **Generating Questions**—Respect avoids leading questions ("Don't you agree that great strides have been made toward equality and tolerance?"), avoids forced-choice questions ("Do you think it is harder to be visually impaired or hearing impaired?"), and avoids biased questions ("Our school doesn't discriminate, right?").
- **Working with the Data**—Respect requires listening skills during the interview (maintaining eye contact, asking follow-up questions based on responses, paying attention to nonverbal cues) as well as ethical evaluation of the data (asking for clarification rather than making assumptions, avoiding taking a person out of context). When the interviews are finished, I help students synthesize the data to create a meaningful thesis.

My academic objectives for this assignment are clearly stated and aligned with NCTE standards 5, 7, and 12: conducting research utilizing a variety of sources, including people; gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing data from their findings; generating ideas and questions toward discovery; and using spoken and written language to generate and communicate a compelling message to an audience. Beyond these objectives, I am also looking for my students to gain a deeper understanding of human experience by interacting with someone whose life, at least on the surface, has been different from their own; in so doing, they might "develop an understanding of and respect for diversity . . . across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles" (NCTE, Standard 9). Some of the most gripping essays I have read have been from students without disabilities who have interviewed an indi-

vidual with a disability. In many cases, their insights have been profound because they have recognized and begun to overcome their biases. Relying on this rich personal experience, they have gone beyond merely summarizing the data or writing a biography to generating compelling commentaries about an easily overlooked aspect of diversity.

The second writing activity I recommend emerged from a conference session with Tom Romano, where he had both veteran and preservice teachers write an "I Am What I Am" prose poem. Following that session, I wrote my own "I Am What I Am" poem exploring my identity. That activity in itself was refreshing and eye-opening, leading to self-discovery in the following poem:

I Am What I Am

I am what I am.
I am a wife, a mother, a teacher, a woman.
I am someone who wants my faith and relationships
to be the primary focus,
But I often make myself the primary focus.
I am what I am.
I am a lover of books who often leaves my lover to
do more practical things.
I am a writer who rarely writes.
I am what I am.
I am a housekeeper, albeit a lousy one sometimes.
I am a part-time PT, OT, and ST. I am a series of
initials without the real credentials.
I am what I am.
I am an idealist who still believes in reality.
I am a dreamer for more than the mediocre, but I
am one who might be seen as mediocre.
I am what I am.
I am a rule follower. I am someone who expects
others to follow the rules.
I am a daughter, a sister, a friend, a colleague.
I am what I am.
I am strong, and I am weak. I am independent, and
I am needy.
I guess I am a walking contradiction.
I am what I am.

I thoroughly enjoyed writing this piece in my journal as a part of my own reflective practice. I encourage teachers to use this activity with their students because I think both teachers and students will find it to be personally enriching. What was even more significant for me than writing this poem, however, was when I tried the same approach from my son's perspective. He cannot write his own "I Am" poem yet, but through writing a version looking at life through his eyes, I discovered a beauty in his story.

Dominick's I Am What I Am Poem

I am what I am.
I am a boy—a boy with special needs. They don't
seem so special to me because they are all I've
ever known.
I am a boy who needs braces on my legs,
who needs a walker,
who needs a wheelchair,
who needs a talker,
who needs therapy—
speech therapy,
occupational therapy,
physical therapy,
school therapy,
private therapy—
who needs my mom and dad.
I am what I am.
I am a lover of books,
an avid counter,
a chatty Cathy,
an irrepressible smiler,
an imitator,
a squealer,
a signer,
an army-crawler,
a hugger,
and a kisser.
I am what I am.
I am a teaser who will continue my actions if I ever
get a laugh.
I am a bouncer and a kicker when I am happy
or mad.
I am what I am.
I am a great brother who will give hugs and always
watch out for my siblings,
But they often have to watch out for me.
I am a crier when I don't get my way,
when I have to go to bed,
when I am mad,
but rarely when I am hurt.
I am tough.
I am what I am.
I am frustrated, frustrating, delighted, delightful.
I am what I am.
I am a boy with special needs, but really I am
special.
I am what I am.

Two friends get to know one another better. © iStockphoto .com/Kim Gunkel

This assignment can be an opportunity for students to walk in someone else's shoes or, potentially, roll in someone else's wheelchair. Not only is this a great writing activity for our students, it is something any teacher could do to understand his or her students with disabilities better.

Encouraging High Expectations

As a parent of a special needs child, I now have a better understanding of *all* students and the crucial support they need: for teachers to understand each student's unique abilities, to set the goal high enough, and then to recognize every effort along the journey toward that achievement. For this to happen, some students will require alternative forms of assessment. Having a variety of assessments will not undermine our high standards but rather provide more accurate ways for all students to show that they have accomplished these high goals. Other changes will cause us to reconfigure the classroom environment to allow greater mobility and accessibility for all students in their approach to the finish line. These necessary adjustments may at first seem like more work for us as already overworked educators. However, running alongside a student with disabilities in the academic race will not only shape the identities of that student and every other student in our classroom, but it will also ultimately shape each of us, not only to be better teachers but also better people.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Interviewing family members or friends can be a valuable way for adolescents to learn about themselves and their families. "Helping a Teen Plan and Conduct an Interview" can be a important resource. It includes a video of a sample interview that can be shared with students. http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/tips-howtos/helping-teen-plan-conduct-30113.html

Robyn Seglem and Melissa VanZant

Privileging Students' Voices: A Co-Teaching Philosophy That Evokes Excellence in *All* Learners

A special education teacher and an English teacher show how raising expectations for all students and creating a community of readers and writers can work toward fulfilling the true meaning of "least restrictive environment."

Meet Robyn

It was the week before a new school year in a new school. After six years of teaching language arts primarily at the high school level, I now approached a new challenge: teaching English to those myth-making creatures known as seventh graders. To make matters even more interesting, I discovered that for one hour a day, I would share my classroom, my students, and my lessons with Melissa, a special education teacher. Co-teaching did not scare me. I had experienced the concept before, yet in those situations, the special education teacher always lurked in the back of the room, waiting for instances when students worked quietly so he could aid his students as the need arose. Since that time, however, I had spent a summer with the Flint Hills Writing Project (FHWP), an affiliate of the National Writing Project, and had walked away assured that effective collaboration between teachers could model the power of this approach to students, enabling them to meld their individual strengths into powerful learning experiences for the class. Thus, during our first meeting, I shared my vision with Melissa, offering strategies embracing student-choice and student-led discussions. In that moment, I couldn't understand the puzzled look that crossed her face, but it didn't take more than a couple of weeks into the school year to figure it out.

Meet Melissa

For the record, I didn't question Robyn's sanity; I merely wondered what planet she was from. She appeared to come in peace, but her attitude and abilities were alien to me. Robyn would soon discover she had joined a faculty engaged in a mostly nonverbal debate about least restrictive environment (LRE): the federal requirement that students with disabilities be educated, to the fullest extent possible, in classes with students who do not have disabilities. We understood every student was entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment as mandated in the Individuals with Disabilities Act, but we disagreed on implementation. Every IEP team decides appropriate setting for students with special needs, but school culture drives that decision in ways I did not yet fully realize.

Frankly, I felt apprehension about co-teaching and embarrassment about my apprehension. As the special ed teacher, my place was to be excited about co-teaching. I had read the research showing that, when executed correctly, co-teaching helps students with learning disabilities increase their grades and peer status (Mahony 59; Welch 373). I loved the idea and wanted to be a part of a successful team, but I had yet to witness such a model in the field. My experience of co-teaching had starkly contrasted best-practice research. Our district referred to the general education partner as the *lead teacher* and the special education counterpart as the *supporting teacher.* The distinction undermines collaboration, conveying this message: *Your* students need to make it in *my* class. *My* job is to organize lessons; *your* job is to make sure the kids understand them. We didn't design classes to fit needs; we "fixed" students to fit classes. With the true nature of collaboration as misunderstood as what students needed, I

protectively kept most of my square-peg students out of the round holes of the general setting. I sheltered them in self-contained language arts classes with me. They wouldn't have general-ed peer models, but at least they were safe from classrooms intolerant of perceived lack of ability.

My special-ed colleagues and I often discussed this dynamic and raised the issue at faculty meetings, to the chagrin of other teachers who were not thrilled to be asked to change their approach so more students with IEPs could be included in their classes. Now, here stood Robyn, a teacher welcoming my students into her classroom. She disarmed my protective instinct, looking to me to share ideas to reach *all* students. The nonverbal LRE debate was about to get a new voice.

Our Story

With pressures from NCLB intensifying due to low test scores in subgroups including special education, our district, like many others, approached students not as individuals but as rigid categories: "poor," "Hispanic," "African American," "disabled," or "regular"—a category particularly insulting to any student not included in it by our district. As the teachers responsible for reading scores in the special education subgroup, we had all the eyes on us, applying pressure to our first stab at collaboration. Yet we shared a common belief: We refused to define students through narrow lenses. About one-third of our students had IEPs, and many others fit into one or more of the other subgroups. Yes, their experiences helped shape their behaviors in the classroom, but rather than trying to squeeze them into preconceived categories, we sought ways to help them weave their stories into the larger narrative that became our classroom. Every student had something to offer, and we fought to assure them we privileged no single voice over another. And we modeled this ourselves. Robyn didn't have domain over the "regular" kids, nor did Melissa have domain over the "special" kids. They were all ours, and we would survive the demanding year together.

Because of her IEP status, some of her previous teachers happily accepted anything she gave to them, glad to see she had at least tried. This did not work for us.

We took several deep breaths and a stance. While there are always more questions than answers, some things we knew:

1. We knew test scores only provide snapshots of information, rather than definitions of students.
2. We knew our struggling students have interests and skills that test scores cannot identify, and we can draw those out to connect them to information and encourage their academic growth.
3. We knew grammar drills and isolated vocabulary studies barely affect reading achievement and take time away from what students need: sustained reading that allows students to experience the joys reading can bring (Atwell 111).

So, we set out to create our community of readers and, thus, learners. Here is some of what we learned.

Getting Past the "I Don't Know" Reflex

One of our first shared students, Katie, viewed learning in much the same manner as many of our students with IEPs. Katie took more time than her classmates when completing her work. In her eyes, this slower processing meant something was wrong with her. This perception, paired with an ingrained belief that there was only one correct answer, led to a superficial approach to reading. Rather than reading for deeper meaning, Katie glossed over assignments in an attempt to just get things on paper. To her credit, this approach worked in the past. Because of her IEP status, some of her previous teachers happily accepted anything she gave to them, glad to see she had at least tried.

This did not work for us. During early classroom discussions, we recognized the avoidance tactics Katie and some of her classmates used. It frustrated us to hear the interesting ideas and perspectives on life these students shared one-on-one, yet none of this emerged in the classroom. We vowed to push all our students past the "I don't know" reflex. At first, we refused this answer when students pulled it from their reserves, gently prompting them with questions while assuring them they had the power to succeed. For example, when a question about author's position evoked this

reflex, we would solicit personal opinions on the topic, then ask, "Do you think the author felt the same way? What part gave you that feeling?"

Yet, this was not enough. We needed to equip students with the skills required to ask their own questions and make connections with the text. So, we turned to Socratic circles, which help students dig into text and use their findings to foster group discussions that reveal interpretations beyond what a single reader could uncover independently. During Robyn's time at the FHWP Summer Institute, a guest speaker, Matt Copeland, had introduced the strategy, walking participants through the process. Captivated by the possibilities Socratic circles offered, we used his book, *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School,* as our guide. For students like Katie, much of their hesitation revolves around the idea that school means unraveling *the* answers. Yet, as Linda Elder and Richard Paul point out, this often indicates thinking has stopped. By teaching students how to turn answers into further questions, we teach them how to think critically (297). Socratic circles seek to do this by teaching students to ask questions such as "why" and "how" of the text, themselves, and others (Copeland 11). Taking umbrage with the idea that readers should be satisfied with a passive role—answering comprehension questions at the end of a text—we insisted they take a stand with a text and its authors. Do you agree or disagree? Why? What experiences inform your position? Does the author makes valid points? To prepare them for annotating texts, we used the think-aloud strategy to model how we clarified meaning, connected to other texts and ourselves, asked questions, summarized, and made predictions, important skills we knew our readers needed (Beers 41).

Students made notes in margins, drew connections between ideas, and circled unknown words. In preparation for a discussion on "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes, one student read the first line, "The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees," and commented on her paper, "the setting is dark, windy and cloudy," showing her ability to pinpoint literary elements and translate the poem into her own words. Later, she questioned the characters' actions, writing, "I don't understand why they would gag Bess, the landlord's daughter. She didn't do anything wrong!" She also monitored her comprehension, noting, "I'm getting lost. I'm trying to understand what's happening and why they tied her up." By the end of her reading, she answered some of her questions and went back to define some unknown words she circled.

While all the students benefited from this approach, we noticed that Katie in particular embraced this practice. As she watched her classmates form their own questions, she began to see that everyone struggled with words and meaning at different points in their reading. Most importantly, she recognized there often is no correct answer when interpreting text. To help push this idea, once students became comfortable with dissecting text, we introduced them to a specific form of Socratic circles. Made up of two circles, the participants in the inner circle brought their questions and annotated texts to the discussion. Together, they built a collective understanding and identified questions they still had. The questions students raised in "The Highwayman" discussion ranged from trying to determine precise meanings for some of their circled words to examining the role of Tim the Osler, a character only briefly mentioned but—on further examination—key to the story. One student connected the poem to works by Edgar Allan Poe, spurring further conversation. His connection was challenged on the grounds that "The Highwayman" was "very lovey-dovey," but he stood his ground, pointing out that Poe "had some of that in his poems, too." Another student furthered his ideas by saying, "I agree because Edgar Allan Poe stuff is really deep and mysterious, and lots of the stuff in here was like that." Together, they showed their comfort in airing their questions, examining details, and defending their conclusions.

In the meantime, the outer circle participants monitored the dynamics of the discussion by tallying when speakers spoke, noting positive ideas and behaviors, and offering suggestions for building better conversations (Copeland 80–81). This allowed students to take control of the dynamics of the discussion, helping ensure all voices were heard. Because this approach emphasized the importance of *all* voices, Katie, as well as other students with IEPs, began to reshape her image of herself as a learner. Slowly, she began to share her own interpretations, questions, and connections. As her classmates responded, her desire to dig deeper expanded. Often during study halls, she would remove herself

from the classroom and sit in the hall pouring over the next assigned text. On her return, her paper would be filled with scribbled questions and ideas evoked by the text, evidence of her increasing confidence in herself as a reader.

Katie's progress, as well as that of many other students, spurred our growth as collaborators. By the end of our first year, our teaching roles began overlapping. At first, Robyn served as the content expert and Melissa as the strategic expert. Now, however, Melissa began digging into curriculum to strengthen her skills, while Robyn, who always felt at ease with all students, began to understand what drove each student's learning differences.

Helping Students Identify Themselves as Readers

Two years later, Marcus arrived with abounding strengths. Athletic, funny, and socially graceful, he transitioned to middle school seamlessly. He came armed with strategies to bypass roadblocks posed by his learning disability and was academically successful in the majority of his classes. His Achilles' heel? Reading. He masqueraded as an engaged reader in class, but his mother described the battleground her normally happy home became every night when it was time to read. Marcus and his father engaged in nightly reading maneuvers, resulting in repeated stalemates. His parents worried as they watched him surrender his image of himself as a reader and, with it, his scholastic self-confidence.

We could not ignore what we saw: that isolating them from peers reinforced students' beliefs that they weren't readers.

Marcus's plight typified that of many of our students, especially those on IEPs. He came to middle school with reading goals and the memory of being pulled for intensive reading instruction. This strategy, a cornerstone of special education practice, seeks to help students get back on their reading feet by building decoding, fluency, and fundamental comprehension skills, using prescriptive texts often coded by grade level with standard questions at the end. We saw the reasoning behind the strategy but also its negative side effects—most notably embarrassment associated with leaving the room for special instruction. Despite our understanding, we could not ignore what we saw: that isolating them from peers reinforced students' beliefs that they weren't readers. Our previous endeavors had shown us that by teaching students how to interact with one another as they questioned a text, we could help students shake this self-image. But was this enough? Through his actions, Marcus suggested not. He had the basic skills, yet his refusal to put them into practice by settling in with a book prohibited these skills from growing beyond the basics.

With two years of working together under our belts, we had ironed out some of the kinks that accompany collaboration. We understood our roles: Robyn painted a larger picture using tools made available by respected literacy researchers; Melissa figured out the details needed to scaffold the learning experiences for students with IEPs. Yet, we now spoke the same language and shared the same vision. Thus, by the time Marcus landed in our class, we both recognized our new challenge: Make believers of even the staunchest holdouts. We needed to, as Nancie Atwell proposes, "eliminate—or at least reduce—frustration and to *make reading easy*" (17; italics in original). As evidenced by the battles with his parents, the sheer prospect of reading frustrated Marcus. So while we wholly believed in using Socratic circles, we also realized that could only be one piece of our approach to make our class less restrictive in terms of reading. Socratic circles required whole-class readings, which could be accomplished through shorter texts. But the only way to get students to enjoy reading, thus making it easy, was to allow them to individually choose the novels they would read and to give them time in class to actually read (Atwell 12).

Effective immediately, therefore, every Friday was Reading Day, where students arrived clutching beloved novels such as the Twilight series, *The Lightning Thief,* and *Crossing the Wire.* On these days, using Atwell as our guide, we roamed the room asking questions such as "Is the story plausible?" and "What is the main character like?" (92). With two of us working together, we could have meaningful conversations about reading with every student. We wanted them to see that questioning should continue outside Socratic circles.

To our delight, most students took to Reading Day with the enthusiasm we envisioned, spreading out around the room on cushions, countertops, and beanbag chairs before the first bell rang to nest in with their books. Marcus, however, abandoned books faster than we could select them, saying that "they

just weren't that interesting." After talking up more than 30 books, we gave him *Stormbreaker,* the first in the Alex Rider series by Anthony Horowitz. We hoped this action-packed series, which features 14-year-old Alex Rider who has taken over his recently murdered uncle's role as a spy for a British intelligence agency, would intrigue Marcus enough to keep him reading. The final bell rang without Marcus abandoning the book, and we waited with bated breath to see if Alex Rider would survive the night. We steeled ourselves when Marcus approached us the next school day and handed us the book. Imagine our joy when he asked, "Do you have the next one in the series? I finished this one last night."

Success! We did it! *He* did it! Marcus continued reading the books in the series. Marcus carried a novel with him, no longer just pretending to be an engaged reader. He simply was one. Discussing Marcus's reading goal at his annual IEP meeting, his mom confirmed our hopes. The reading war had not only ceased, but the parties had switched sides. Now she had to take Marcus's book away from him at night so he would sleep.

Connecting to Students' Interests

By our third year, our model proved so successful that our principal scheduled all of Robyn's seventh-grade English classes with Melissa. This made it possible for Melissa, three hours after meeting Marcus, to meet Mariela. Mariela walked in with a chip on her shoulder. As an eighth grader who had not passed the previous year, she felt sure she knew what to expect of seventh-grade English, and she broadcast her opinions through her body language, lack of engagement, and occasional comments. Her interests remained deeply rooted in two things: her Latina culture and her experiences as a teenage girl. In her eyes, English class held no connection to these interests and, thus, her life. Yet, she discovered our approach constrasted with the one she had experienced the prior year.

Our bookshelves overflowed with books we had accumulated through various means, including collecting credits from Scholastic, haunting used bookstores, and attending the NCTE Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) workshop. Mariela gravitated toward these shelves, first stumbling upon *Red Hot Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Being Young and Latino in the United States* by Lori Marie Carlson, a slim volume celebrating the culture Mariela knew and loved. For Mariela, this was the first time she was encouraged to read about topics that spoke to her. Soon, she began exploring other titles that held personal meaning. In these books, Mariela discovered characters and experiences she could connect to, igniting within her a flame similar to Marcus's. Mariela, who had been identified as at-risk due to multiple factors, had become a reader eager to share her interpretations and opinions with us, as well as any classmate who would listen.

The Wiki

The introduction of a wiki also created opportunities for Mariela and the rest of our students to share their interpretations and opinions. Through the wiki, we created a literacy community that offered students the opportunity to "participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members" (NCTE/IRA). To each student, we provided an individual page for expressing observations and opinions with others in the class. We pushed students out of their comfort zones, asking them to move beyond simple summary to analysis of elements such as theme, character development, and writing style. This change in the level of questioning proved uncomfortable for many students. Similar to Katie's experiences two years before, many of our students, including Mariela, had not learned how to think critically. But, through their monthly blogs, students began to understand how to integrate examples from the text to support their ideas. They were, as Grant Wiggins reminds us in his work on authentic assessment, "real writers trying to make a difference, find their true audience, and cause some result in their readership" (30). The students now had a reason to share favorite stories, a reason that did not solely exist to prove to us they were reading. The students knew their peers would access their ideas, and they truly wanted to convince their classmates to pick up their books, so they continually worked to improve the product they provided through their monthly book reviews.

The students knew their peers would access their ideas, and they truly wanted to convince their classmates to pick up their books, so they continually worked to improve the product they provided through their monthly book reviews.

For Mariela, this experience held particular appeal. She blossomed from the recalcitrant student in the back of the room to an avid blogger. As illustrated in the following excerpt in her blog about *Brothers in Arms* by Paul Langan and Ben Alirez, one selection from the Bluford High Series that chronicles experiences faced by teens in an urban high school, personal connections urged Mariela to continue to read and write about what she read. What follows is Mariela's unedited prose:

> This book is the best since my last Sarah Dessen book. I love it because it kind of connects to me and my life. About three years ago I lived in a gang relative enviroment. It was down in were they call the West Side and we lived with my grandma. I loved my life, so many friends and family went to school with me. I was friends with people in the West Side gang, and so were my brother and sister. When my mom found out we were going to be what they called jumped in (doing something a member of the gang asked you to do or just get beat up to be in the gang) she was frightened. She was worried one of us would go to jail, another would end up dead or maybe just pregnant. So she moved us. All of us were really angree of her because we wanted to stay with our friends and family. I still see my friends over there today, but now that im older i do think she made the right decision. This book also reflects back to me because he is mexican and so am I.

The message behind Mariela's words emphasizes the power of connections. In this selection, Mariela described her brush with gang life, which gave her insight into the decisions the characters in her book had to make. Mariela's ability to empathize with the characters of the book allowed her to draw on her prior experiences to comprehend and interpret the message of the book. As she relayed the gist of the story, Mariela could reference her life, giving the story a weight simple plot summary could never do. And always mindful of her classmates who would be reading her words, Mariela worked to provide nuggets of wisdom pulled from the book as well as from her life.

For Mariela, the wiki was a place she could be herself and explore her strengths as a reader. There, she was not seen as a student at risk. Instead, she became an expert on books and gained confidence from the feedback of other students and her teachers. The wiki proved an empowering experience for her, and, as a result, Mariela left our class better prepared to tackle the challenges awaiting her in high school. Like Alfred W. Tatum and Valerie Gue's work with African American boys, another at-risk group, we discovered Mariela became more engaged in literacy when she was granted the opportunity to write in a way she found "meaningful and significant" (93).

Melissa's Final Thoughts

One of our former students emailed me last week to ask for new book suggestions. She wasn't a voracious reader when our English 7 journey began, but her membership in our learning community changed her attitude. I understand this because I, too, was a member of that community and bear its mark. I was no longer the self-contained special educator who taught all my classes in the resource room, venturing to regular classrooms only to advocate for my students and monitor their progress. In branching out myself, I embodied one of special education's core principles: Every learner has a right to an education in the least restrictive environment. Our classroom was successful because, before we honored students' voices, we honored each other's. We did not question students' right to be in our class, only the best way to meet their needs. We did not worry we would sacrifice the progress of higher achieving students; we understood our mission was to find ways to further every student's learning without watering down the curriculum. This was *their* classroom, *their* community, and we felt privileged to facilitate their growth. When coaching students to become active readers, we asked them to value their voices and merge them with those of their peers to bring new understanding to all, just as we did behind the scenes.

Robyn's Final Thoughts

Like Melissa, our experience taught me the importance of privileging students' voices over the well-meaning adult voices we often listen to. Prior to our collaboration, I approached working with students on IEPs in much the same manner as those who profess to be colorblind. I prided myself on *not* seeing the disability. While well intentioned, this view does a disservice to our students. If we deny the disabilities in our students, regard-

less of whether or not they have been identified, we also deny many of their strengths. No student comes to us as "normal." When we allow all students' voices to be heard by giving them choices in their reading, time to become engaged in their books, an online forum for sharing opinions, and opportunities to engage in Socratic discussions, we empower them, allowing them to find their rightful places in the classroom and to see beyond a label written on a piece of paper. To me, this is what providing a least restrictive environment is all about. EJ

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Developing Reading Plans to Support Independent Reading" asks students to brainstorm texts they have read recently and use a Graphic Map to rate and make notes about them. Students look for patterns among the maps, connecting the texts that they enjoyed the most and those they least enjoyed. Students then use the maps, booklists, book reviews, and other resources to create a reading plan for the future. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/developing-reading-plans-support-836.html

With Aaron, I Feel Lucky

I always say The Pledge when
I visit with Aaron. He puts
my hand on my heart so I do
it right. His teacher says,
"She's busy," but Aaron sees
me through. I don't fret standards.
I fold washcloths. Show him
the sign for work. Pay attention
when he looks at me. I don't
flinch when he grabs my hand
out of the blue and holds it tight.
He wants to tell me something,
and I can tell it's very important,
the way he squints his eyes.
Aaron never makes small talk.
We always skip the, "Bless
your little heart." I can tell
he admires me, not for what
I say or the way I look. I'm just
someone he likes to pass time
with, folding washcloths, whatever.
No one is expecting much
from Aaron, but in that moment—
I feel lucky because Aaron
expects so much from me. He sees
me and wants nothing more than
to hold my hand and try so
very hard to tell me something.

Darious Shows Me His Heart

He acts out odd days.
We suspect Mom
alternates his dosage
with his twin. She's
doing her best, I say,
and try not to take it
to heart when Darious
rolls on my floor hollering,
"You're not my mama!"

I pull wheat crackers
from the closet—place
them on a tissue.
Seconds later he yells,
"These cookies are dirty!"
"Throw them away,
my love," I sigh. He eats
them all then shouts,
"I'm not your love!"

He draws flowers
in a row, names them
for teachers he likes.
I am first. "You can
have it," he says.
"Thank you, my love."
I cup his baby soft chin.
He told me one morning
the lights went out.
"Were you scared?"
"Yes."
"I would be too."

So He'll Be Ready for Spin the Bottle and Other Games

There's no instruction
manual for kissing.
It's one of those things
you learn by doing.
That's what I tell myself
when I teach my son
to kiss me back. Autistic,
he never just learned to do
anything by watching.
We begin lesson one.
Watch. Watch Mommy
sign, *I want a kiss please.*
He grins and leans in, lips
wide open, pulling back
after impact. My entire
mouth is wet with slobber.
We will try again. Watch.
Watch Mommy sign *more,*
and I lean in this time
with my own exaggerated
pucker. I stop. Suspend
and release in slow motion,
a smooch with sound effects.
He repeats it, and I think
we will try again. Watch.
Watch Mommy sign *more.*
I want more kisses please.
When we stop, my face
is thick with little boy
saliva, smeared and dried-
on little boy saliva. Twenty
years ago, I'd have sent boys
packing for such an offense,
but today I wrap him up
in arms. Watch. Watch
Mommy sign, *Thank you.*
I love kisses from you.

I Never See Him Coming

A yellow nub of crayon is a siren, directing
rush hour traffic through his head. Hand suspended
in air, he waits for the green light, then punches the gas,
striking with vengeance. The construction paper never
sees it coming. There's passion, even fervor, in his eye
as he bears down, massing fields of goldenrod. I call
out to my son. I want to take him up in a big hug, praise
his drawing. He runs, singing, "Tah-kah-tah-kah-tah."
I call again and again. He's away without listening, then
his body slams my chest, not knowing how to embrace.
His kisses are all slobber and mouth. His teeth can nip,
but I sign, "More!" He squeals, grabs my face with both
hands. My cheeks squish, scalp stings when he pulls
my hair. Breathless, I belong to an eighty pound bear.

—Allisa Abraham Hall

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Tonya Merritt

Finding the Will to Individualize Instruction: How My Son Made Me a Better Teacher

Maintaining high standards, communicating with parents, and giving students a personal connection to literature help this teacher reach more students.

The beauty of American public education is that we acknowledge the potential of every individual with the clear expectation that each person should receive a high-quality, academically focused education. Our challenge, then, is how to achieve that goal when students come with a variety of backgrounds, talents, interests, limitations, and motivations. Currently, federal mandates tell us that we will know we have left no child behind when all students perform at equally high levels on a formal test, and while I can appreciate the need to quantify evidence of educational equity, it concerns me that homogeneity is the only way we deem fit to measure parity in the current system.

While politicians may score points for declaring that they will not rest until every student reaches proficiency in the major academic disciplines, their standardized method of calculating progress (or lack thereof) fails to recognize that performing well and performing equally are not the same thing. My heart breaks every time we confirm students' suspicions that they are "not good enough," even though they may be making steady progress and performing at their highest level. How many times can we tell children they are novices or rank at the seventh percentile before they embed that failure into their self-concept? For me, this question is no longer academic, but deeply personal.

A Will to Educate

Two years ago, while administering the *To Kill a Mockingbird* unit test to my last section of ninth-grade English, I went into labor. Four hours later, Brent and I welcomed our second son, William Atticus Merritt, into the world. Two hours after that, Will's pediatrician told us that he suspected Will had Down syndrome. That moment has affected every part of my life since.

While we had decided on Will's name before his rather expeditious birth, I have often thought it appropriate that we named him after one of the great literary advocates of fairness and inclusion. Will has encouraged me to become much more active in my efforts to "climb into [my students'] skin and walk around in it" (Lee 48). Although Will has not yet entered formal schooling, our experiences navigating the Early Intervention program and working with Will's therapists to help him acquire skills that come naturally to many children have allowed me to reexamine the way I view my role as a public educator.

Shortly after leaving the hospital with Will, it became clear that he would need accommodations in place to survive. He was not eating well enough to gain weight and had been diagnosed with failure to thrive. Our lactation consultant taught us how to use a Haberman feeder (Will's first piece of adaptive equipment) that would allow us to help him manage the flow of milk so he could drink a full meal without tiring and eventually transition to nursing. At first, it took him 30–40 minutes to take a four-ounce bottle.

Will's occupational therapist worked on developing his oral motor skills to improve his efficiency with eating by teaching him each discrete skill in the deceptively complex task of drinking.

She taught me how to stimulate his face and mouth before a feeding, how to position him so that he could focus entirely on eating, and noted the development of his suck-swallow sequencing. We tried every nursing position several times with and without adaptive equipment, and although Will could latch and initiate feeding, he could not sustain a nursing session long enough to meet his nutritional needs.

He was, however, making progress with bottle feeding. Within a few months, Will was taking four ounces from the Haberman feeder in 20 minutes and was ready to move to regular bottles. His occupational therapist recommended a brand that would be an easy transition from the Haberman, and Will made the switch without complications before I returned to teaching. We had not achieved the original goal of nursing, but we had removed barriers, used adaptive equipment as a bridge, and focused on purposefully teaching Will the discrete steps of the process to reach the desired outcome of his being able to eat efficiently and gain weight. Seeing Will go through this process to learn something as basic as how to eat made me realize how much more support some students need to master academic skills—and how much such students can master when they are given the appropriate support.

The Need for Individualized Education

During my 15-year tenure as a high school teacher, I have implemented countless accommodations for my students and participated in many Admission and Release Committee (ARC) meetings to establish goals and accommodations for students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). A few years into my career, I determined that some common accommodations, such as breaking large assignments into smaller steps, would benefit many of my students. As a result, I implemented universal accommodations in my general classes. It seemed that many IEPs included the same basic accommodations, and my monitoring would certainly be easier if I were implementing those practices for all my students.

At first, the structure created some success. Some students who had been struggling, but who did not have an IEP, thrived with the accommodations in place. I liked having a structure to guide students through complex assignments, so I wrote step-by-step instructions for my more detailed assignments, restated and rephrased major points, used redirection to discourage off-task behaviors, marked my sheets, and considered my job done. A believer in inclusion, I felt I had done my best to make my instruction accessible to all students.

Over time, many students challenged my assumptions about my classroom. Certainly, some students with special needs, especially those who only required structural support, were successful with the more focused instruction. Others were not, for a variety of reasons. As I have gained experience working with a broad range of students, it has become clear to me that many students need more than a step-by-step worksheet and a seat in the front row to be successful in a mainstreamed public school classroom. Just as Will needed specialized instruction to learn to eat successfully, some students need individualized and targeted instruction to master the discrete skills of academic concepts that many of their peers acquire easily.

Unfortunately, it is difficult for students to receive a truly individualized education in the current system. Teachers are bound by rigid definitions of proficiency that all students are supposed to reach at the same rate. We often lack the time, expertise, funding, or inclination to adjust our classroom practices or schedules to meet the needs of students we may think do not belong in a regular classroom because they seem unable to meet our standards of proficiency. Sometimes the IEP is so general and the accommodations so generic that it is difficult to tell what would be beneficial to a student.

While I am a devout believer in mainstreaming, I worry that the focus on homogenous performance discourages many teachers from addressing the diverse needs of students in their classrooms. About seven years ago, I had a student with Asperger's syndrome who was very smart but had difficulty participating in class activities appropriately. As a result, Adam often escalated conflict with teachers and peers because he did not know how to self-edit his responses. That same year, I had my first student with a terminal diagnosis. Over the first semester, I watched Brandon flirt with the girls, joke about his hot-rod wheelchair, and miss weeks of school for hospital stays. I tried to be flexible about his schoolwork, but I found myself torn between wanting to

push Brandon to keep participating in the rituals of life and recognizing that mastering character analysis is somewhat less meaningful to a teenager with six months to live. Last year, I had a native Spanish speaking student who posed a challenge because it was difficult to tell if Silvia's barriers to success were her lack of English proficiency or her disability or both. These students needed an individualized approach to find success in the classroom and a unique understanding of what success would look like for each of them.

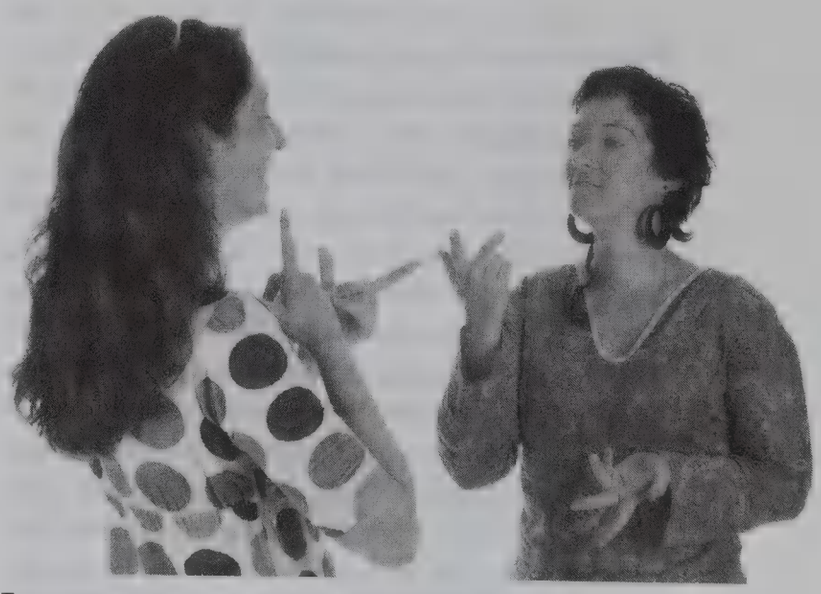
The Need for Advocacy

Often it is a persistent parent, rather than the school's documentation, that results in a teacher understanding a student's needs. But not all parents have the time, resources, or confidence to advocate for their children either in an ARC meeting or directly to the teacher. After two years of navigating our state's early intervention program (a good one compared to those found in some other states), I have much more empathy for the parents I see at the high school level who are sometimes bitter or exhausted from years of battling the system for the free public education that is promised but seldom delivered.

When Will turned one, we had our first lesson in advocacy. Will had been working with a physical therapist in addition to his occupational therapy, and because he was ready to transition to solid foods and begin learning sign language, we wanted to add speech therapy to his schedule. We were at the limit of automatically approved units of service, so we had to appeal to get the additional units for a service Will clearly needed. We have appealed Will's allocation of units at least every six months since then in addition to maximizing our insurance benefit and accessing Medicaid to ensure that Will continues to get the services he needs to reach his potential. We do not always receive what we request, but we always exhaust our lines of appeal until we reach the best possible outcome. How often do families face similar hurdles to access services in our schools?

Over the years, I have come to appreciate the parents who are proactive on their child's behalf. I find I learn a lot more about students' needs from conversations or emails from parents at the beginning of the year than I do from the clinical descriptions of students and their disabilities on the IEP. For example, a few years ago I had a student with dysgraphia who used a laptop to facilitate most writing tasks. Jacob tested well above average in reading, wanted to be a writer, and was appropriately scheduled in Advanced Ninth Grade English. His parents took an active role in his education, establishing email contact before classes began and checking in frequently throughout the school year. Corresponding with Jacob's mother at the beginning of the year helped me understand which types of assignments he would need to complete in shortened formats, when I should ask him to answer in handwriting versus typing, and how we could modify procedures such as notebook checks to meet Jacob's needs. Maintaining open communication throughout the school year ensured that the implementation of Jacob's IEP was appropriate to his needs and his academic goals. When parents do not initiate contact, I try to establish an open line of communication with them as early as possible so we can discuss the student's progress and challenges regularly, not just when a problem arises.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate the parents who are proactive on their child's behalf. I find I learn a lot more about students' needs from conversations or emails from parents at the beginning of the year than I do from the clinical descriptions of students and their disabilities on the IEP.



Two women communicate in sign language. © Vladimir Mucibabic/Fotolia.com

Improving My Teaching

As my understanding of the need for truly individualized education (for many students, not just those with documented disabilities) has developed, I have made significant changes to my classroom practice and philosophy. After Will's birth, I realized that I had been operating under the paradigm that it is my job as the teacher to present the material and the students' job to learn it. I took my part of the job seriously, working diligently to create detailed and structured assignments rich with rigorous content. If a student was unsuccessful, it was easy for me to tell myself that I had done my part of the job and to record the F as the natural consequence of the student's actions.

Now, I focus more on what students should be thinking than on what they should be doing. I still use my carefully designed step-by-step instructions to guide complex procedures, but I tend to teach by modeling metacognitive processes with think-alouds and by questioning students about how they determined that an answer is correct. I teach them patterns of response—what I think, why I think it, for example ("Increasing")—and talk to them about strategies for remembering content by actively building connections to images and prior knowledge. Many students with special needs lack the academic skills to know intuitively how to navigate a rigorous activity independently, so I design instruction with bridges to help those students demonstrate their knowledge and meet the academic expectations.

I now take responsibility for structuring the content so it is more accessible to students by making abstract concepts more concrete. For example, when teaching theme, I use Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson's guidelines from *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense* to establish the standard pattern—"sometimes when . . . a person may . . . because . . ."—for writing theme statements (188–94). The structure makes it easier for students who are still operating on a concrete level to write a theme that is neither trite nor simply plot summary. I give students the flexibility to deviate from the pattern if they are comfortable with the concept, but overall my students have an excellent success rate using the formula.

When students are struggling, this structure also gives me specific questions I can ask to guide them toward this type of theme. I walk around the room checking students' progress as they write their early attempts at theme statements, and if I notice students' themes for Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" begin as a topic (revenge) or a cliché (every action has a consequence), I ask about the protagonist's development in the piece and how that experience reflects the general human experience: Does Montresor's attitude toward revenge change in the story? How do you know? Why do you think he feels that way? Do people sometimes imagine revenge will be better than it actually is? Such questions help move students toward a more sophisticated response, such as Morgan's theme statement: "Sometimes when they're insulted too much, a person may become vengeful because they have become tired of taking the insults." Or Cameron's: "Sometimes when a person seeks revenge a person may feel guilty after he is successful because he realizes he has done bad." Using this type of system, buttressed with individual monitoring, removes some of the developmental barriers for students who may not be ready to work comfortably at the level the standards require.

Sometimes, students with disabilities need tasks broken down into smaller steps than do their typical peers, much like Will needed to learn how to sequence his swallowing to eat effectively. The use of graphic organizers can remove procedural barriers for students who struggle to include all the required parts of a complex response. For example, when we study Juliet's soliloquy just before she fakes her death in act 4 of *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet,* I want students to notice that what Juliet says and the way she says it reveal that Juliet becomes frantic as she prepares to take the potion. To facilitate their thinking, I use a three-column organizer (see fig. 1) that chunks the speech into smaller, meaningful sections and asks students to summarize and explain the significance of each chunk. The graphic organizer is similar to Kylene Beers's "It Says–I Say" strategy, which uses summary to allow students to understand a difficult passage before connecting it to their prior knowledge (165–71). Breaking the complex task into small sections with discrete steps keeps students from being overwhelmed by a long soliloquy and provides a visual clue about how structure reveals emotion as the length of the sections vary. Taking

FIGURE 1. Chunk and Think: A Literary Analysis Organizer

Romeo & Juliet act 4, scene 3: "God knows when we shall meet again."
Name _____ Date _____ Block _____
In this scene, Juliet sets the plan she and Friar Laurence have made into motion. As you read her soliloquy, summarize each "chunk" and explain how each section adds meaning to the play through characterization, foreshadowing, and theme development.

What she says	What it means (summary)	Why it matters
Juliet: Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again. I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins, That almost freezes up the heat of life. I'll call them back again to comfort me: Nurse!—What should she do here? My dismal scene I needs must act alone. Come, vial. [*Takes out the vial.*]	*Juliet says good-bye to her Nurse but becomes afraid when it is time to drink the potion. She thinks about calling the nurse back in but decides she needs to carry out the plan alone.*	*This part reminds me that Juliet is still very young—14—and that she still needs the support of her Nurse when she is afraid. It also shows her determination to be with Romeo no matter what because she plans to drink the potion even though she is afraid.*
What if this mixture do not work at all? Shall I be married then tomorrow morning? No, no, this shall forbid it. Lie thou there. [*Laying down her dagger.*]		
What if it be a poison, which the friar Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead, Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd, Because he married me before to Romeo? I fear it is: and yet, methinks, it should not, For he hath still been tried a holy man. . . .		
Romeo, Romeo, Romeo! Here's drink—I drink to thee. [*She falls upon her bed, within the curtains.*]		

steps to make content and academic processes more accessible to students of varying abilities has empowered me, as a teacher, to celebrate what my students can do while still holding them to a high academic standard.

Responding to Literature about Disability

As my pedagogy has evolved, so has my response to the literature we use in my classroom. A year before Will's birth, a student I had taught as a ninth grader wrote a letter to me as his senior reflection on literacy for his portfolio. Jeremy had been in a collaborative General Ninth Grade English class and had been a conscientious student who was successful with the extra structure the class provided. He has Asperger's syndrome and depression and relates better to adults than to his peers, but he participated well in class and mastered skills fairly easily.

I had enjoyed having Jeremy in class and spoke to him often in the hallways throughout his high school career, but I was surprised to see his reflection focused on an experience in my class. In his letter, he discussed how much he had enjoyed reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* because he could relate to the characters in the book. What surprised me was that the character he most related to is Boo Radley. He found comfort reading about a character who was as lonely and misunderstood as he often felt. Jeremy's reaction prompted a significant change in the way I address the themes in *To Kill a Mockingbird* with my students, shifting my focus from Atticus's fight against racism to the more accurate and encompassing theme of otherness in the novel. We discuss the real and artificial barriers to inclusion in the

Maycomb community and our own, empowering students to share and reflect on their experiences as outsiders as a way to connect to the novel.

My greatest curricular challenge, however, occurred after Will's birth and was much more personal. Our ninth-grade short-story unit culminates with a study of James Hurst's "The Scarlet Ibis." The story is rich in figurative language and imagery with interesting characters, a clear theme, and an easily interpreted symbol, so it is a nice vehicle to synthesize the skills students learn throughout the unit. However, published in 1960 with a World War I setting, the story depicts some outdated attitudes about disability. When the story loomed on the schedule the following year, I was filled with dread, unsure about whether I could lead students through an objective analysis of the story when its significance had changed in such personal ways for me. When I read "The Scarlet Ibis," I always feel sorrow for Doodle's mother because we never see her loving Doodle for who he is and what he can do. For whatever reason, both parents appear to define Doodle by his limitations.

I opted to be honest with my students about my misgivings, and as a result, students began asking questions about my experience as we read. Now, in addition to analyzing the story's literary qualities, each class has meaningful discussions about what it is like to raise a child with a disability. We discuss how expectations of people with disabilities have changed over time; why some people choose to terminate pregnancies when they learn their unborn child will have a genetic or health concern (and why I hope they will choose not to if they ever face that decision); and how we treat people who do not conform to society's definition of normal. This story has become a highlight of the year for me now because it offers a chance to share Will's story with my students and to share lessons about resilience, faith, and tolerance in a way that is meaningful to them.

Making Connections to and for People with Disabilities

Many of our students will grow up to have personal experiences with disability: Some will be the doctors who deliver the news, some will receive the news themselves, and some will support a friend or family member. Most will at some point have to explain disability to their children. I want them to know that Brent and I cherish Will; we love him completely, delight in his accomplishments, look forward to a promising future for him, and worry about how the world will treat him. Because the students see a real-world context for "The Scarlet Ibis," they pay more attention to both the content and the craftsmanship, resulting in text-rich analysis. They also see how literature can speak to us and contextualize our lives through my example.

While not every teacher will have this personal connection to the story, any teacher can use contextually relevant articles to open dialogue with students about disability. Next year, our ninth-grade teachers plan to use articles about American snowboarder Kevin Pearce's relationship with his brother David, who has Down syndrome, to contrast the narrator's embarrassment at "having a crippled brother" (Hurst 169) and open a dialogue with students about their experiences with and attitudes toward disability.

My hope for Will is that, when he enters public school next year, he will enter an environment where he is valued and his accomplishments are celebrated, whenever they may occur in relation to his peers. Unfortunately, the way we currently measure progress means that Will, who scores in the tenth percentile or less in every area of development, will most likely receive a barrage of subtle and direct messages that he is not good enough. After all, under NCLB, schools do not get credit for the learning that students do after the test. Some teachers, assuming that he will never meet proficiency in time for the results to matter, may give up on Will to focus on those students "on the bubble" with more potential to meet standards on the typical timetable. This breaks my heart for him.

As a society, we have made enormous progress in the way we value people of varying abilities. I am thankful that, unlike a generation ago, no one suggested that we institutionalize Will and move on with our lives. I am delighted that he has a legally protected right to a free public education. I am concerned that, like many students with disabilities, he will be judged educationally deficient because, although he makes progress, he does not keep pace with his typically developing peers or learn in the same way as them. I am embarrassed that I have sometimes been a party to creating this environ-

ment for my students. And I am resolved that I will do everything in my power to make sure that my practice as an educator strives to meet the needs of each student as an individual.

School should be settings where we encourage and celebrate each student's accomplishments. As Alfie Kohn states, "our emphasis should be less on *student achievement* (read: test scores) than on *students' achievements*" (italics in original). Will benefits far more from us cheering when he cruises and transitions from the coffee table to the sofa than he does from us documenting the fact that, because this is occurring at 29 months of age, it puts him in the first percentile for gross motor development. Likewise, my students make more progress when they see me celebrating their successes instead of documenting their deficiencies.

It is a moral imperative that we continue to provide a rigorous education to all students; however, by measuring each student against a norm, we place too much emphasis on pace and not enough on progress. The mandated expectation that all students master skills at the same rate devalues the progress made by students who take a little longer to acquire skills and fails to inspire those who attain them quickly. Instead of focusing so much attention on test results, educators should be about the business of producing authentic learners and productive members of society.

When, in *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Scout comes home from her first day of school, determined never to return because her teacher told her not to read with her father anymore, Atticus wisely asks, "Do you know what a compromise is?" (Lee 50). Perhaps it is time we, too, struck a compromise that balances our need for accountability and parity with our acknowledgment of diversity and individuality. EJ

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Spend a Day in My Shoes: Exploring the Role of Perspective in Narrative," students imagine spending a day in someone else's shoes. After reviewing the characteristics of narrative writing, students write from another person's point of view. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/spend-shoes-exploring-role-265.html

Daniel L. Preston

Finding Difference: Nemo and Friends Opening the Door to Disability Theory

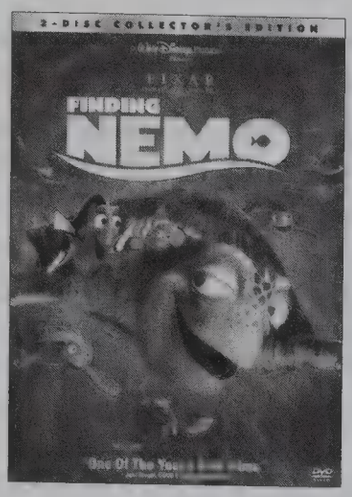
By addressing a different set of questions about well-known animated films, students learn to think critically about how disability is represented in society.

Our students have no doubt watched a good chunk of the Disney library of films. Earlier generations saw *Cinderella, Snow White,* and *Robin Hood* in first release; later came *Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin,* and *The Lion King.* Over the last 25 years, Pixar has joined in by releasing *Toy Story* and its sequels and a host of other films to delight audiences everywhere. Entertainment, however, has never been the only reason that as parents we allow our kids to watch the Disney and Disney/Pixar films. We hope that the stories will teach them lessons about people and situations. We hope they can see themselves represented there—and represented well—and we hope they can find something to take away from the film other than the characters' names, colors, and characteristics.

While middle school and high school students may have watched these films when they were younger, chances are they did not do so with a critical eye toward difference and disability, despite the fact that these films serve as excellent tools for teaching about difference. Recent estimates label 20% of the world's population with some form of disability (Riley 1), making it important for us to consider the ways in which disability is represented in literature, film, and other cultural texts. Disability does not only exist solely on the televised stages of a Jerry Lewis telethon but also in the fabric of the cartoons that we enjoy with our children. The following pages describe how the film *Finding Nemo* can be used as an excellent tool for helping students at all levels to start thinking about disability in different ways.

Interpreting Disability

Scholarship across the relatively new field of Disability Studies has defined several models through which disability can be interpreted, and for the purposes of this article, I will use two of the primary ones: medical and social. In broad strokes, the "medical model" focuses on a physical difference of the body: a broken or missing limb, blindness, or the inability to hear. The medical model seeks to "normalize" the population identified in its ranks. In contrast, there is the "social model," developed in Great Britain, in which disability is seen as arising at least partly from an environment that creates barriers for people with impairments. In other words, disability does not exist solely because people use wheelchairs; disability exists because people who use wheelchairs need more ramps. In this way, the focus is not on "fixing" the person with the impairment, but rather how society can improve its integration of people as they are. These models are just a framework, however, as even these scholars admit that the criteria used to account for persons with disabilities are out of date (Riley 3–4). As Disability Studies scholar Tom Shakespeare has pointed out, no one model can completely encompass the need for an interpretation of "disability." "Disability" as a single concept, therefore, becomes just as difficult and complicated to define as the concepts we now identify as race, gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity. This places disability on equally important and intersecting terms with the other identity categories. In discussing disabilities, it is important to focus not



The *Finding Nemo* DVD Cover.

only on physical disabilities but also on hidden disabilities, those that cannot be seen.

Reading *Nemo*

For readers who don't know the film, *Finding Nemo* tells the story of an overprotective father and a son who are separated when they have an argument. Marlin, the father, spends the rest of the movie searching "the entire ocean" looking for Nemo. Along the way, Marlin meets Dory, a fish with short-term memory loss, and the two fish travel together. Nemo, on the other hand, has been taken across the continent to a dentist's fish tank as a present for his niece at the end of the week. Viewers see the film from both sides of the story, and as Nemo and his father attempt to find each other, Nemo learns that he can do things by himself. Along the way, Marlin learns to trust others and realizes that the world isn't as frightening as he once believed.

After watching the film with students, I ask them what they saw and how disability was represented in the film. The first answer surrounds Nemo's "Lucky Fin" (one fin is congenitally shorter than the other), and the second is about Dory and her memory loss. It's not difficult to imagine Nemo's smaller fin as a disability, nor is it uncommon to place Dory's memory loss on the spectrum of disability. Likewise, viewers are likely to translate Marlin's overprotective nature as that of a typical father. All of these assessments are based on the medical model. Even Marlin's interactions with his son become that of a father trying to "fix" his son in particular ways. Fewer than ten minutes into the film, Nemo is swimming around talking to his father and gets stuck inside a plant. As he is working his way out, his father remarks, "Nemo, let me do it; you'll never get out of there yourself"—and already depicts his son as "less able" than other fish. Later, as Nemo is introducing himself to his new classmates (an octopus, a fish, and a seahorse), one of them notices his smaller fin:

KID#1 (Octopus): What's wrong with his fin?

KID #2 (Fish): He looks funny.

(Seahorse's DAD slaps Seahorse with fin.)

KID #3 (Seahorse): Ow! Hey, what'd I do? What'd I do?

Seahorse's DAD: Be nice, it's his first time at school.

MARLIN: He was born with it, kids. We call it his lucky fin.

NEMO: Daaad!

KID #1 (Octopus): See this tentacle? It's actually shorter than all my other tentacles, but you can't really tell, especially when I twirl them like this. (twirls)

KID #3 (Seahorse): I'm H_2O intolerant. (sneezes)

KID #2 (Fish): I'm obnoxious.

Already, there have been clear demonstrations of both models of disability under discussion here. Marlin, as the protective father concerned about Nemo's success, worries and smothers Nemo to the point of alienating him. The kids, on the other hand, acknowledge the difference and take it in stride, creating an atmosphere free (at least for the moment) of disability. What is particularly nice about this exchange is that the kids share their differences with Nemo as well, establishing that they are all different in that they each have different attributes, but on some level that makes them the same, too. While moviegoers are likely to find intolerance to water and obnoxious behavior humorous, it is easy to see that when taken on their own

Nemo with Gill, who never tells Nemo he can't do something. From *Finding Nemo.* Dir. Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkirch. Dreamworks, 2003.

merits, these conditions can be socially isolating and debilitating.

Later, as Nemo meets the others in the fish tank at the dentist's office, we are introduced to a variety of characters, each with a unique trait that can be troublesome in certain circumstances and incredibly useful in others. Consider Bloat, for example, the blowfish that expands under stress. Several times throughout the movie, Bloat expands to the point where he needs help to recover. Stress is disabling for him. However, during the rescue of Nemo near the end of the movie, that particular trait is invaluable as Gill is exiting the tank.

Gill is the character that Nemo most admires. Like Nemo, before he came to live in the tank, Gill lived in the ocean. Also similar is Gill's damaged fin, which allows Nemo to understand that a physical deformity need not negatively affect the life led. More than that, Nemo is valued as important and capable—even special—because of his size and ability. Never once does Gill tell Nemo he can't do something. This behavior directly contradicts Marlin, who constantly reminds Nemo about his fin and how it limits his ability. A class discussion of this film could go into far greater detail, with space given to all characters: what makes them different, unique, and interesting, as well as what might create the context for their (mis)treatment.

Which characters are always allowed to do what they want? Which ones are not? Under what circumstances and by which characters are they stopped?

Classroom Activities for a Deeper Understanding

While trying to identify disabling conditions in *Nemo* or any text, students may have difficulty determining what constitutes a disability. They should realize that they are not alone and that scholars are grappling with this question every day. One of the many reasons for models of interpretation is *because* the definition has become so complex. Also, the chances are good that they are already familiar with these concepts, just in more general ways. Remind students that they are likely to have seen characters with disabilities on TV or in movies before, but might not have thought about how those characters were depicted. As Paul K. Longmore points out, there are plenty of examples: Porky Pig and his stutter, Mr. Magoo and his huge glasses, and Captain Hook from *Peter Pan,* to name a few (65). Here are some basic questions to get students thinking about disability in what are perhaps new ways for them:

- Which characters in the text appear to be physically different from the others?
- Which characters in the text are treated differently from the others? Why?
- Which situations in the text cause characters to feel inferior to others?
- What stereotypes are present in the text?
- What labels are used to identify certain characters to the rest of the group? This could take the form of name-calling or identification with (or by) a physical, cognitive, ethnic, or cultural trait, among other things.
- Which characters are always allowed to do what they want? Which ones are not? Under what circumstances and by which characters are they stopped?

Posing these questions does not automatically expose a character's disability, nor does a discussion stemming from these questions guarantee a thought-provoking, critical look at disability in society. There is more work to be done than this for both a textual reading and practical application. What these questions can do, however, is help students notice where different treatment occurs because of a disability, and it is up to the students to determine the correctness and value of those behaviors. Such questions, and a subsequent guided dis-

cussion of them, help students form their own critical questionings of other texts, as well as a way of looking at society, and disability, through a Disability-Studies lens.

Along with movie discussions, an activity that challenges standardized thinking about ability can also serve students well. The following exercise is suggested in Wendy Chrisman's essay, "The Ways We Disclose: When Life-Writing Becomes Writing Your Life." Chrisman discusses the importance of the time and place of disclosures, including the ways that those disclosures take place between students and teachers, particularly in writing classrooms. She suggests developing a "hierarchy of disability," paying attention to the social costs of a public disclosure. The exercise she recommends helps promote critical thinking:

> Together as a class, make a chart on the social hierarchies of disability, the relative risks of disclosing each type of disability, the stigmas associated with each type, the material consequences in terms of employment, civil rights, and so forth. (135)

Figure 1 shows a chart I made for *Finding Nemo* that follows Chrisman's directions.

As Chrisman suggests, the questions raised through such an exercise can become a point of departure for further research, such as "finding employment statistics of people with disabilities" (135). Research projects that grow out of a genuine curiosity about real people in the real world—even if that curiosity is initially sparked by a film or cartoon—are likely to be taken much more seriously by students than are typical projects completed for the generic "research paper."

Enabling Views of Disability

Many feature films and novels already familiar to students can offer further opportunities for critical thinking about disability. Along with *Finding Nemo,* Disney/Pixar's *The Incredibles* (2004) offers a good look into the world of being different. The discussion about Dash going out for sports and the question of who is considered "special" can spark a lively debate among students. Tom Hanks's Oscar-winning role as *Forrest Gump* (1994) could also prove fruitful for analysis, especially if students recognize their own perceptions of his disability and how they shift throughout the movie. For a more classic (and text-based) example, students could be encouraged to read Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* or John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* through the lens of disability studies, looking specifically at conditions or characters that help to establish a disabling environment for the other characters in these novels.

Research projects that grow out of a genuine curiosity about real people in the real world—even if that curiosity is initially sparked by a film or cartoon—are likely to be taken much more seriously by students than are typical projects completed for the generic "research paper."

I show movies to my students to get them talking about disability in ways they haven't thought of before. Teachers use movies in classrooms all the time because, as Joseph Coencas writes about working with movies and students with special needs, "[M]ovies are an ideal motivational device for auditory or visual learners who resist or have difficulty with the printed word" (67). Teaching, however, is never

FIGURE 1. Analyzing Disability in *Finding Nemo*

Character/Trait	Trait	Visible	Consequences of Disclosure
Nemo/"Lucky Fin"	Boy/Missing arm	Yes	Employment/social/physical ability
Dory/Short-term memory loss	Short-term memory loss/ mental disorders	No/Maybe	Social stigmas/employment/family
Jacques/OCD cleaning	OCD	No/Maybe	Social stigmas/friends/interactions
Bruce, Anchor, Chum/ Addiction disorder	Alcohol/Drug addiction	No/Maybe	Employment/social stigmas/ family/friends

about a single audience, and so we need to think in broader strokes: movies, if framed by critical questions, become useful for all classrooms at all levels. It is the work of disability studies in part to question and change the representation of people with disabilities.

Finding Nemo is just one movie among several that can teach that lesson simply by virtue of presenting both sides of the argument and letting the audience decide for itself. However, as teachers who want to provide tools for interpretation, we are in a unique position to shape the kinds of questions asked about texts. Therefore, using the films, cartoons, and novels our students already know to introduce critical questions posed by disability studies makes a lot of sense. As teachers, we are invested in changing the lives of our students for the better. We know that students will go home and talk to their friends and families, sharing information on social networks such as Facebook and MySpace. The more enabling view of disability they get in our classrooms from a sophisticated critique of these cultural texts has the potential of transforming how people with disabilities are treated in the larger community.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Exploring Satire with *Shrek*" uses fairy tales as an introduction to satire. Students view a scene from a movie and examine the ways in which it departs from typical fairy tales. They are then introduced to the four techniques of satire—exaggeration, incongruity, reversal, and parody—and asked to identify these techniques in a clip from *Shrek.* Students next select a fairy tale to satirize and share their finished stories with the class or in small groups. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-satire-with-shrek-810.html

Tammie M. Kennedy and Tracey Menten

Reading, Writing, and Thinking about Disability Issues: Five Activities for the Classroom

A high school teacher and a college teacher argue that by bringing a Disability Studies perspective into discussions of traditional novels, websites, TV shows, and films, teachers can help students develop critical-thinking skills.

Disability, unseen, unacknowledged, and unexamined, is already always present in the [classroom]. It is present as students in our classes, in the language we use, the ways that we teach and tutor, even in physical spaces and institutional structures. Assumptions about disability . . . also script attitudes about its counterpart, ability.

—*Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Brenda Jo Brueggemann, with Jay Dolmage, "Rethinking Practices and Pedagogy: Disability and the Teaching of Writing"*

Nearly all secondary educators are required to take at least one special education course to become certified. However, the focus of this course is generally on how to teach Special Education (SPED) students, not how to teach *about* disability issues and culture. In fact, much attention is given to keeping Learning Disabled/Emotional Disorder/Behavioral Disorder (LD/ED/BD) students' disabilities invisible. Teachers learn how to modify lesson plans so as not to expose these disabilities as well as to increase a sense of inclusion for the SPED student. While we believe that the emphasis on privacy rights and inclusion is essential, we also argue that the (in)visibility of disability in our classrooms is problematic. As the opening quote above suggests, whether we talk about it or not, (dis)ability issues permeate our classes, our teaching, and our students' experiences in and outside of the classroom. We have found that students encounter disability issues from a variety of sources (e.g., family, friends, school policies/officials, fundraisers, doctors, TV shows, and websites). However, they tend to think about disability as an individual issue—something they "have" that can be stigmatized and/or a person who suffers from a deficit or loss who needs to be "cured," pitied, or treated differently from "normal" people. We want to encourage teachers and students to examine and reflect on how these perceptions of disability are created, how we might engage with issues of disability more critically, and teach all students more effectively.

To enrich our understandings of (dis)ability and explore new ways to read, write, and think about perceptions of difference and abilities, we have integrated a Disability Studies perspective into our classes. That is, we have adopted a view of the world promoted in the mission statement of the Society for Disability Studies:

> The Society for Disability Studies (SDS) is an international non-profit organization that promotes the study of disability in social, cultural, and political contexts. Disability Studies recognizes that disability is a key aspect of human experience, and that the study of disability has important political, social, and economic implications for society as a whole, including both disabled and nondisabled people. Through research, artistic production, teaching and activism, the Society for Disability Studies seeks to augment understanding of disability in all cultures and historical periods, to promote greater awareness of the experiences of disabled people, and to advocate for social change. (http://www.disstudies.org/about/mission/sds_mission)

Part of the social change called for in this mission statement is that disability be viewed partly as a function of society—that the physical and social barriers in society contribute to the "othering" of people with disabilities.

However, bringing disability studies into the classroom means more than just adding another identity category to be analyzed. Rather, working with disability has the potential to transform assignments, activities, discussions, and curricula to acknowledge better the material realities of both students and teachers. In this article, we share five practical teaching activities for introducing disability into the secondary English curriculum that also address NCTE/IRA objectives for the English language arts.[1] We have used these lessons to help students better analyze the language/rhetoric of disability, understand how disability is represented in literature, and uncover how the media (e.g., TV/movies and websites) depict people with disabilities. While teachers might focus specifically on disability issues, we have incorporated these activities into our current curriculum and teaching practices that focus on reading, writing, and discussing diversity, culture, identity, and social issues.[2]

Students who are familiar with disability issues are more likely to reject the negative stereotypes associated with disabilities and better empower themselves or others who may experience disability in some way.

Why Teach about Disability Issues?

Despite the complexities associated with disability and classroom instruction, it is important to address this issue in English and language arts classes. First, disabilities in American society and in the secondary classroom are prevalent. It is estimated that there are 38 to 52.6 million people with documented disabilities (15–20% of the population), which means that most students will have a family member or loved one who has some mental or physical impairment (Taylor 2). Furthermore, the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have resulted in millions of students with disabilities receiving a public education, increasing the contact both teachers and nondisabled students have with disability issues (Taylor 3). In spite of the prevalence of disability, Lewiecki-Wilson, and Brueggemann with Dolmage point out that "because the *disabled* do not form a single, visible category with a set of common, identifiable features, people with disabilities typically are not construed as a unified group" (2; italics in original). Consequently, many false assumptions and tensions related to disability infiltrate our daily practices and experiences.

Second, disabilities are too often left unnoticed, recognized only as an "inferior state and a personal misfortune" with stigma and silence surrounding those who have a disability (Thomson 6). The work of disability studies scholars over the last few decades has helped us understand that disability is not just an individual problem or deficiency. These scholars critique medical models of disability that focus on "curing" the individual so that he or she might be more normal and productive. They demonstrate how what becomes considered a disability/handicap is based more on social meanings attached to particular physical and mental impairment than actual reality (Lewiecki and Brueggemann with Dolmage 1). Thinking about how words shape these social meanings is especially important when teachers consider how "language use carries with it a culture's discourse and assumptions about 'normal,' with its power to center, marginalize, or 'other' people, their ways of thinking, and their choices of actions in the world" (Price 56). Furthermore, disabilities scholar Brenda Jo Brueggemann et al. assert that teachers and students who study disabilities increase their awareness of the harmful connections of ability, difference, and normalcy that pervade education and society. Students who are familiar with disability issues are more likely to reject the negative stereotypes associated with disabilities and better empower themselves or others who may experience disability in some way. Therefore, it is important to understand and critically think about how various texts shape people's perceptions of disabilities.

Teaching Activities

Below we outline several class activities and we include objectives, NCTE standards, and rationales linked to each activity. We encourage teachers to engage their students in these activities and adapt them as appropriate.

Identifying Disability Stereotypes

Objective

Characterize common stereotypes associated with disabilities through the creation and analysis of Facebook profiles.

NCTE Standard(s)

1, 4, 9, and 11 (www.ncte.org/standards)

Rationale

Help students to discover what assumptions they make about people with disabilities and to analyze how those assumptions can be both inaccurate and harmful. Students also explore how public identities are created and interpreted.

Resources

A series of pictures that represent people both with and without visible disabilities (e.g., people who use wheelchairs, people with Down syndrome, people with prosthetic limbs). Distribute one picture to each group.

Lesson

- Put students into groups of three.[3]
- Give each group a picture of a person from which they will create a Facebook profile that includes biographical information such as name, relationship status, profession and income level, preferred activities, groups to which he or she would belong.
- Display picture for class and ask each group to share profiles. Have each group present its profile before discussing the rationale behind how they created it.
- Once all groups have presented, discuss as a class the following: (a) why the groups selected the profile characteristics they did for their person and (b) why those choices may (or may not) be accurate, problematic, and/or stereotypical for those who based the profile on pictures of people with visible disabilities.
- Discuss how these stereotypes are similar to those based on race, gender, religion, and other differences.
- Ask students to reflect on an aha moment from the activity, especially how other "differences" are linked to disability, and share their moment with the class.

Analyzing George's Assumptions and Treatment of Lenny in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*

Objective

Illustrate how George's assumptions about Lenny and his disability affect George's treatment of Lenny.

NCTE Standard(s)

1, 2, and 9 (www.ncte.org/standards)

Rationale

Investigate how the assumptions that George makes about Lenny affect George's treatment of Lenny, and not necessarily in a positive manner. Students should examine whether or not George's treatment of Lenny ultimately leads to Lenny's death.

Resources

Of Mice and Men, flip chart paper, and markers

Lesson

- Put students into groups of three.
- Based on their reading of the novel, have students brainstorm a list of five assumptions George makes about Lenny's abilities (what he is/is not capable of doing). Have students find references in their books to support why they identified those assumptions (quotations and page numbers).
- As a class, make a list of assumptions on the board.
- Have each group select three of the assumptions from the board and analyze how each assumption affects George's actions toward (or treatment of) Lenny. Ask them to come up with two examples per assumption. Students should use their books to locate specific examples, including page numbers.
- After they have completed this task, ask each group to select one assumption and present it to the class. They should use flip chart paper and write out the specific examples to post as they present the information.
- Students should take notes on the information presented and then write an essay analyzing George's assumptions about Lenny's mental disability and how that affects his treatment of Lenny.

Additional Ideas/Tips

Teachers may also use the character May from *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd.

Examining the Effects of Disabilities on Self-Image

Objective

Examine thoughts, ideas, and attitudes toward neurodevelopment disorders, such as autism.

NCTE Standard(s)

1, 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (www.ncte.org/standards)

Rationale

Encourage students to expand their ideas about how autism may affect a person's life. Much of the information regarding autism portrays the disorder as one that makes it nearly impossible for a person to function fully in the world, or the person possesses superior intellectual processes that alienate him or her from others. Help to shift student perspectives by having them read about what it is like to be autistic from a highly successful, educated person with autism.

Resources

"My Brain Is a Web Browser: How People with Autism Think" by Dr. Temple Grandin (http://www.grandin.com/inc/mind.web.browser.html); Wordle (www.wordle.net).

Lesson

- Ask students to write one or two paragraphs about everything they know, or have heard, about autism (e.g., What is it? How are people who have autism affected by it? What are the skills and capabilities of someone with autism? How do you think people with autism feel about being autistic?).
- After they have discussed their knowledge, ask them to brainstorm where they got their information (e.g., TV, books, friends/family, school) and share their responses.
- Next, have students read Dr. Temple Grandin's article, "My Brain Is a Web Browser: How People with Autism Think." Have students reflect on Dr. Grandin's overall attitude toward autism as they read (Is her attitude mostly positive/negative? Does she sound brilliant? Unique? Strange? Confused? How do you know? Does she make autism sound like a disability? Provide textual support for your answers.). By the end of the article, students should be able to describe and defend their response. (If your students do not have access to computers, you can complete this next step ahead of time and distribute printed copies for students.)
- Ask students to pull up Dr. Grandin's article (http://www.grandin.com/inc/mind.web.browser.html) and select and copy all the text—without the references.
- Have students navigate to Wordle (www.wordle.net) and select the link for "Create Your Own," and enter Grandin's article into the window. Wordle is an online tool for generating "word clouds" from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text and provide a visual image for analysis.
- Have students analyze the ten most prevalent words to determine whether those words convey the same attitude they felt Dr. Grandin revealed as a person with autism. Students should write a one-paragraph response of this analysis.
- Ask students to write a paragraph in which they examine their thoughts, ideas, and attitudes toward neurodevelopment disorders, such as autism. Students should examine whether or not Dr. Grandin's attitude is what they expected and explain why or why not.

Additional Ideas/Tips

Teachers might show clips from HBO's *Temple Grandin* or ask students to read supplementary articles on autism and Grandin's work on HBO's website: http://www.hbo.com/movies/temple-grandin/index.html#/movies/temple-grandin/detail/resources.html.

The Rhetorical Appeal(s) of Telethons and Walk-Run for Disability X

Objective

Learn about rhetorical appeals, use them to assess websites of organizations that focus on fundraising

for disabilities, and identify how these websites might perpetuate stereotypes of disabilities.

NCTE Standard(s)

1, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (www.ncte.org/standards)

Rationale

Help students become aware of how some websites/charities perpetuate stereotypes of disability. Ask students to consider and work toward becoming more of an advocate and/or activist for disabilities. Charity events often center on some sort of cause to raise awareness and money to "fight" disabilities and diseases (e.g., multiple sclerosis). Although these events are intended to support individuals with disabilities, many people of that population feel offended because of the way the event portrays the disability. Some people with disabilities argue that these campaigns feel patronizing or miss the real-life issues involved in being a person living with a disability. In addition, because these causes are seen as "charity," people without the disability often do not understand the complexity of the issues involved and give money instead of serving as advocates and activists. For example, the Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon for the Muscular Dystrophy Association often relies on Mr. Lewis presenting a person with the disability in a way that reinforces the charity model of disability or that people with a disability are "broken" or "needy."

Resources

Information on rhetorical appeals (*Everything's an Argument,* or *Writing Arguments,* and/or Purdue's OWL, "Using Rhetorical Strategies for Persuasion," http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/588/04/). Websites for Multiple Sclerosis Society, Parkinson's, St Jude's Children, American Cancer Society, and other disability causes.

Lesson

- Teach students the three classical persuasive appeals: logos, ethos, and pathos.
- Select a website that focuses on disability. Have students identify appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos and discuss their effects on the intended audience.
- Break students into pairs or small groups and have them select a "disability cause."
- Ask students to study the websites associated with their chosen disability and/or fundraising campaign.
- Ask students to generate a list of assumptions these websites make about people with disabilities. For example:
  - Who is the primary audience for this website?
  - How much does this audience already know about the disability/disease?
  - What seems to be the audience's attitude toward the issue? Is this attitude different from that of the public or the people with the disability? Why? How?
  - What values, beliefs, or assumptions about the disability/disease would the audience share?
  - How do these various organizations appeal to others to contribute money or time?
  - Do they use mostly pathos, ethos, or logos? How effective are these appeals?
  - How are these appeals based on negative or problematic stereotypes about disabilities? Why do these appeals work to persuade people to give money or their time to these efforts?
- Discuss findings as a class, asking students to bring in one specific example to share with everyone.
- Ask students to write a one- to two-page reflective essay that they turn in with their analysis of the questions above, which focuses on what they learned about how disability organizations perpetuate stereotypes of disabilities, as well as how these websites might be revised to better address the needs of people with disabilities.

Additional Ideas/Tips

ELL learners can access the websites in their first language, as available, to analyze them.

Locating and "Talking Back" to Negative Stereotypes of Disability

Objective

Locate and analyze examples of the seven negative stereotypes that dominate television and movie representations of people with disabilities and explain how these stereotypes might be harmful.

NCTE Standard(s)

1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12 (www.ncte.org/standards)

Rationale

Jack A. Nelson argues that there are seven negative stereotypes that dominate television and movie representations of people with disabilities: (1) sinister, evil, and criminal (morally culpable); (2) pitiable and pathetic; (3) unable to live a successful life; (4) a burden; (5) maladjusted; (6) better off dead; and/or (7) "supercrips" (5–9). The appearance of the "supercrip" image is often based on real-life individuals who overcome the obstacles of disability through a positive attitude and perseverance. This person is often thought to have special gifts that result from his or her disability, superior cognitive abilities, or unusual social skills (Shapiro 16). While the "supercrip" representation often demeans the more pedestrian struggles that ordinary people with disabilities face regularly, it remains one of the most prevalent images in the movies and other media (e.g., *Forrest Gump* and many human-interest stories).

While the "supercrip" representation often demeans the more pedestrian struggles that ordinary people with disabilities face regularly, it remains one of the most prevalent images in the movies and other media.

Resources

TV show/movie clips (e.g., *Glee, South Park, Family Guy, Friday Night Lights, Ray, Scent of a Woman, Edward Scissorhands, Simon Birch*)

Lesson

- Ask students to define what a stereotype is and how it affects the way we think about people who may be different from us. Teachers may share readings or websites to help generate this discussion.
- Pair students. Ask them to come up with a list of stereotypes they have seen about people with disabilities in the media, specifically citing the TV show, book, advertisement, magazine, or movie that highlighted this representation.
- Ask each student to watch a TV show or movie that features a character with a disability. You might also ask them to compare a more recent show such as *Glee* to an older show such as *South Park* or an older film such as *Rain Man* to a more current film such as *Adam* that both depict autism. They should take notes and be able to articulate answers to the following questions:
  - Does the character fulfill one of the stereotypes identified above? How?
  - Even if the character is stereotypical, how does the actor/performer disrupt or challenge this stereotype in some way by his or her performance, the script, or how the other characters are reacting to him or her?
  - Is this portrayal of a character with a disability dangerous or possibly harmful to any groups or individuals? Why or why not?
  - Has the portrayal of the character with a disability changed? How? Why?
- Ask students to write a dialogue between a nondisabled person and the character with the disability explaining how this stereotype is problematic and how the character might want the nondisabled person to think about disability issues from a different perspective.
- Students may perform their dialogues in class.

Additional Ideas/Tips

See "Physical and Mental Disability in the Movies and Television" (http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/disabilitymovies.html) and "Top Entertainment TV Shows Featuring Disability" (http://media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com/2008/03/top-entertainment-tv-shows-featuring.html).

Challenging Habits of Thinking

We hope these five activities will help teachers better formulate practical and effective ways to introduce disability studies into the secondary English classroom. By teaching about disability issues, both students and teachers gain valuable tools for critical thinking that empower them to better negotiate the complexities of difference and their impact on all the "bodies" in English classrooms. Furthermore, working with disability issues in the secondary classroom has the potential to transform assignments, activities, discussions, and curricula to better acknowledge and reflect on the realities of human

differences and our basic assumptions about normalcy and abilities. We invite teachers to examine the cultural narratives surrounding people with disabilities and to reconsider how certain habits of thinking that characterize disability as a "weakness" or something to be feared or silenced can be challenged in and out of the classroom.[4]

Notes

1. The *NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts* may be found at http://www.ncte.org/standards for more specific descriptions.

2. We approach disability issues as nondisabled, or able-bodied, persons. Our interest in disability studies stems from our relationships with close friends and family who have disabilities, as well as our interest in teaching about diversity, inequality, and difference. Disability scholars have pointed out some of the problematic issues of teaching disability studies from a nondisabled perspective. For example, Deborah Marks fears that nondisabled teachers will focus too much on people with disabilities as the "Other" (70). We agree with her concern and recognize that we must be ever vigilant of our biases. However, we also subscribe to an "all hands on deck" philosophy. It is important to build alliances across so-called differences to contribute to social movements focused on justice and social change. In our classrooms, we believe that it's important to establish that we approach disability issues as nondisabled teachers who, as Owen Wrigley describes, have "both biases of [our] position and the privileges of [our] gaze" (vii).

3. In our experience, working in groups of three instead of pairs leads to more collaboration and productivity. If a pairing is a problem for some reason (e.g., ability, personality), the activity can stall. Adding a third person better ensures a range of opinions in brainstorming sessions.

4. We want to thank Patricia Dunn for her helpful feedback on our article. Also, a special thank you to Christina Flaherty-Colling and Nora Bacon for providing us invaluable comments and reactions as we drafted the article.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Persuasive Techniques in Advertising" examines *pathos* (emotion), *logos* (logic), and *ethos* (credibility/character). Students use this knowledge to analyze advertising in print, television, and Web sources. Students also explore the concepts of demographics and marketing for a specific audience. The lesson culminates in the production of an advertisement in one form of media, intended for a specific demographic. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/persuasive-techniques-advertising-1166.html

Cheryl Gomes with James Bucky Carter

Navigating through Social Norms, Negotiating Place: How *American Born Chinese* Motivates Struggling Learners

Ninth-grade students with reading difficulties become highly engaged with a text and write much about it in an authentic writing project.

We are a ninth-grade teacher in a Special Education English class (Cheryl) and a teacher educator (Bucky) who know of each other's work through a mutual interest in graphic novels. Here's what happened in Cheryl's class when her students read *American Born Chinese* and discussed that text in a blog with its author, Gene Luen Yang.

Bucky Sets the Stage: Special Education, Reading, Mandates, Adolescence

Six boys are in Cheryl's ninth-grade Special Education English class at a school specializing in the education of high-needs students in Northern California. Three have Asperger's syndrome; one is labeled as emotionally disturbed; two have nonverbal learning disabilities. Though their disabilities vary, several of them have the shared experience of being bullied in previous school settings, and all have significant difficulties socializing with others. Indeed, only two of the students are friends; the rest prefer to avoid social interaction and lack the requisite skills to interact successfully.

These students also share a commonality with many students nationwide who have disabilities: on average, they read 3.6 years behind their grade level (Blackorby, Chorost, Garza, and Guzman). Typically, these students think literally rather than abstractly, often preventing them from being able to identify literary elements such as theme, symbolism, metaphor, and imagery. Cheryl's students certainly struggle with abstract concepts and inferential thinking. Most do not enjoy literature but prefer nonfiction texts dealing with science or history.

Yet, Cheryl and thousands of educators like her are still responsible for making sure all students are prepared to take state and national assessments. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind have mandated it. Finding texts that motivate and engage her students and using strategies that can successfully improve their reading comprehension can be a challenge, but Cheryl has found that the graphic novel is well-suited in addressing both these concerns and others. This may be due to the graphic novel's inherent ability to provide visual scaffolding. Many students with disabilities may have trouble visualizing what they read. Nanci Bell, co-creator of the Lindamood-Bell Visualizing and Verbalizing strategy, which involves getting students to visualize at the word level, sentence level, paragraph level, and even at whole-page level via attending to specific structure words, asserts that the creation of mental pictures when reading is essential for reading comprehension for every student. If students are not able to form a mental image of the story, it is difficult for them to understand what has happened in the story (Bell). Many graphic novels combine print text with images without sacrificing interesting content or literary merit, providing the scaffold but allowing for quality interaction with the text.

One graphic novel in particular has spoken to Cheryl's class on multiple levels: Gene Luen Yang's 2007, Michael A. Printz Award–winning *American Born Chinese,* which was also a finalist for the 2006 National Book Award. This text helps students ex-

plore concepts of symbolism and theme. It also helps them examine challenges, contacts, and conflicts inherent in adolescence, social conformity, and cultural stereotypes, all of which are exceptionally relevant to these particular students, who struggle daily to navigate social environs and negotiate their identities.

Cheryl and Bucky Discuss *American Born Chinese*

American Born Chinese is a triptych of sorts: three connected visual representations. In this novel, three seemingly separate tales are told, exploring the theme of transformation and change. One features Jin, the overall narrative's main character. Jin is a first-generation American who struggles to reconcile his American life and Chinese heritage while growing up in the San Francisco Bay area. The storyline chronicles Jin's life from elementary school through high school. At each level, Jin is faced with prejudice and adversity. His story beautifully details his difficulty fitting in, finding friends, and dating, experiences that are supremely important to adolescents. In Jin, who stands out because of his ethnicity, Cheryl saw her students, whose disabilities and lack of social awareness made them stand out.

Another of the graphic novel's storylines draws from Eastern mythology, telling the story of the Monkey King, whose greatest desire is to be a deity. The monkey doesn't accept that he is merely a monkey, though a royal one. He aspires to be an all-powerful god. He makes every effort to change himself into a god, believing this transformation will bring him happiness. The parallels between Jin and the Monkey King are clear. Both characters are trying to figure out who they are and what their place in the world is—a journey every teenager finds challenging, especially Cheryl's students.

The third storyline, which is the most profound and uncomfortable of the three tales, revolves around a character that embodies Chinese stereotypes. Named "Chin-Kee," this character exposes readers to extremely negative stereotypes that have been an ugly part of American culture for years, stereotypes created in previous centuries but persisting in part to this day. Though often difficult to read because of its brutal references to these stereotypes, Chin-Kee's narrative has the strongest effect on students and their perceptions of themselves, their culture, and others. This third section vividly demonstrates to students the dangerous effects stereotyping has on others and the anxiety that some may feel when it comes to negotiating their own sense of self with images and ideas they feel may be imposed on them.

Cheryl's students deal with issues of adolescence differently than many others due to their difficulty with social skills. One fear she had before deciding to use this novel in class was that her boys might *not* connect with Jin. Furthermore, she feared they might not engage with her or with each other as they discussed the text's themes. To counter a possible lack of engagement, Cheryl integrated blog technology into the classroom, creating a sort of safe house where her students might feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts. Indeed, Mary Louise Pratt describes safe houses as "social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, [and] temporary protection from legacies of oppression" (17). As a wonderful bonus, the author of the book being discussed, Gene Yang, a fellow California teacher, agreed to become one of the bloggers. The next few sections, predominantly featuring Cheryl's voice, provide a more detailed timeline of how she built her students' literacy and social skills over a period of six weeks by combining this engaging graphic novel with a highly participatory blog.

To counter a possible lack of engagement, Cheryl integrated blog technology into the classroom, creating a sort of safe house where her students might feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts.

Cheryl Helps Students Navigate through Social Norms: Beginning with a Discussion of Stereotypes

Since the theme of stereotyping can be a delicate subject, it was essential to begin the discussion of *American Born Chinese* with a lesson on stereotyping to help us navigate our way through the text and the sensitive issues it raises. Considering the limited social awareness these students had because of their disabilities, before we started the novel it was necessary to first review *stereotype* and the harmful social effects it can have. At the beginning of our discussion, none of

the students actually knew what the word *stereotype* meant, though they all acknowledged having heard the word. To explore its meaning, students were directed to the "Diversity and Human Rights" webpage from the University of Idaho, which contained a chart of appropriate terms to use and terms not to use when referring to particular groups of people. For example, "differently abled" is a phrase preferred to "disabled," and "Asian American" is preferred over "Oriental." Additionally, this webpage contains Richard T. Schaefer's definition of stereotype, "an exaggerated image of the characteristics of a particular group," which students found helpful.

This activity clearly veers into Pratt's "contact zone" territory, asking students to challenge themselves to overcome social discomfort at admitting knowledge of stereotypes while also attempting to create an atmosphere of safe, honest engagement.

We discussed the socially appropriate terms to use when referring to someone who is from a particular country versus someone who has ancestry from a particular country. For example, someone who is from China is Chinese, while a person born in America who has ancestors from China is Chinese American. We also discussed the inaccuracies involved in calling someone from China "Oriental" (as one student pointed out, Oriental is a type of rug, not a country of origin!). Understanding the differences between these terms and knowing the appropriate ones to use is essential for all students, not just those who have limited social skills, because without this knowledge they will not be able to navigate through a multicultural society successfully.

Once my students knew the appropriate terms to use and had a definition of *stereotype,* they participated in an activity we called Courageous Conversation to assist them in working through the stereotypes they would encounter in *American Born Chinese.* This activity is similar to John Gaughan's Four Corners activity, for which students show where they or their peers stand on a controversial social issue by moving to a designated corner of the room marked with a point of view and engage in a discussion of the issue stemming from which opinions seem most or least considered. Courageous Conversation allows students the opportunity to express their feelings and ideas in a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere and encourages open discussion. It is an activity designed to create the feel of a "safe house" (Pratt 17).

To start Courageous Conversation, I placed large pieces of butcher paper up around the walls of the classroom labeled with various cultures, religions, and ethnicities. The students were instructed to quietly walk around the classroom, writing down the various stereotypes they had heard or experienced regarding that group on the appropriate piece of paper. To show my students that this was a safe activity where they would not be judged, I found it necessary to provide an example of each stereotype first to make my students feel more comfortable sharing. The examples I used are blatant and ugly stereotypes I know my students would be familiar with. I reminded them that whatever they wrote would not be seen as a reflection of their own opinions, just as my examples do not represent my opinions. This activity clearly veers into Pratt's "contact zone" territory, asking students to challenge themselves to overcome social discomfort at admitting knowledge of stereotypes while also attempting to create an atmosphere of safe, honest engagement.

After a good list was generated on each piece of paper, we had a class discussion on the effects of each stereotype. We talked about how the stereotypes negatively and inaccurately portray people, and how they can be harmful to others if people believe them. One of the stereotypes written under Chinese American was "good at math and science." A student remarked that this seems like a positive stereotype and asked if there is anything wrong with a positive stereotype. I asked this student to imagine that he was a Chinese American who struggles in algebra, but his teachers assumed that because of his ethnicity he was good in algebra. What would be the consequences of this stereotype? The student admitted that this would probably cause him to feel uncomfortable seeking out the help he needs from his teacher, even ashamed.

From this example of a "positive" stereotype, the class came to the conclusion that all stereotypes—even those that appear to have nice connotations—can be harmful. This discussion set the groundwork for the honest self-reflection in which I asked students to participate later. Moreover, this exercise enabled students to see how their beliefs about and actions toward people of other cultures directly affect individuals.

Navigating through the Text: Building on Previous Lessons and Teaching Symbolism

Since Yang uses symbolism throughout *American Born Chinese,* we then moved to briefly discussing symbolism and how symbols can be found in literature. For students who struggle with abstract concepts, it is a good idea to attach a tangible element to the discussion of symbolism. I first asked my students to identify common symbols found in everyday life and explain their meaning—for example, a red light means stop, a cross represents Christianity, a flag is a symbol of a country, etc. In pairs, students created pictorial representations of common symbols found in their community and wrote down what each symbol represents. Interestingly, my students thought of the symbol first and then thought about what the symbol meant. For example, when I asked what a common symbol for love is, they were unable to think of an answer. However, when I drew a picture of a heart on the board and asked what this symbol represents, they were all able to say that it represents love. This connection my students have to a concrete image supports Bell's theory that students with reading disabilities have difficulty creating mental images from spoken or written language, and that providing them with the images can improve comprehension of a subject. Next, I asked students what words, images, or feelings came to mind when I mentioned words such as *black, rose,* or *thorn.* We discussed how colors, objects, or people could be symbols for emotions or ideas. Students even shared symbols they had found in previous pieces of literature they had read: a colt symbolizing a lost child in Frost's poem "The Runaway"; the chiming of the clock symbolizing the passage of time in Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death"; and the golden ring symbolizing power in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.* Coming up with these examples was an impressive feat for the students in this class. This discussion of concrete image and abstract concept helped provide students with the necessary skills to navigate through the literary elements of Yang's graphic novel and fully comprehend the story.

Once we began the novel, I scaffolded the identification of symbols in the story by identifying the four main characters who seem to be the best and clearest symbols (see fig. 1). Students whose

FIGURE 1. Character and Symbolism Analysis

Character	Actions and Beliefs	Words Associated With	Symbolic of . . .
The Monkey King	Makes his subjects wear shoes; wants to become a god; disciplines self to become a god; is punished by a god and is buried underneath rock; escapes by returning to his normal self	Proud; conceited; determined; searching for self; independent	Represents how some people are unhappy with who they are and want to become a bigger, better person. He represents how true happiness only comes from being yourself.
Jin	Has difficulty making friends because he is different; eventually makes friends with Wei-Chen; has a crush on Amelia; perms his hair so he will look more Caucasian	Unhappy; self-conscious; ashamed	Like the Monkey King, he is unhappy with who he is and wants to become someone else. He represents people who are caught between two cultures and try to find a medium between the two.
Chin-Kee	Annoys Danny; is obnoxious at school; appears to be a know-it-all; dresses differently	Annoying, rude, embarrassing	He represents the worst stereotypes.
Danny	Is embarrassed by Chin-Kee; tries to fit in at school; it is discovered he is actually Jin, but has taken on a new identity as a Caucasian person.	Ashamed; frustrated; self-conscious	He represents people who try to fit in by denying their culture and taking on the identity of someone else. He also represents how being yourself is the only way to be happy with yourself.

disabilities affect their ability to work with abstract concepts such as symbols may require more modeling from the teacher in locating and explaining these literary devices. In addition, some students with disabilities (like many students without them) struggle to understand literature because they often do not use the text when making inferences about the story, but rather rely on assumptions or inaccurate prior knowledge. To prevent this from happening, I forced students to locate evidence from the story before analyzing the symbolism of each character. We outlined the actions and beliefs of each character and brainstormed what words came to mind when we thought about that character. For each claim my students made, I asked them for an example from the story. This helps students to quickly check their own and each other's work, therefore generating, as a class, accurate information about each character.

Once my students analyzed each character, we discussed the possible symbols each character represents. Surprisingly, they had little difficulty identifying what role each character plays in the story and what message each character conveys (see fig. 1). My students discussed how the Monkey King represents those who wish to become larger or better than themselves and who ultimately realize that happiness comes from being one's true self. They identified Jin as a symbol for someone who comes from two different cultural backgrounds and tries to fit into both his "Chinese world" and "American world." For example, they recognized that Jin has friends who are Asian American, but he has a crush on a Caucasian girl. He feels that to get this girl to like him, he should try to "look" more Caucasian (see fig. 2).

The character of Chin-Kee was the easiest symbol for students to identify because his actions and his physical appearance both contribute to the role he represents in the story. Chin-Kee's appearance, as mentioned earlier, is itself a brutal and ugly caricature—one that students must be adequately prepared for before being asked to simply identify symbols and stereotypes. To some extent Jin helped students start to draw our discussions of symbolism closer to our previous discussions on stereotypes, but Chin-Kee is the character that pulled it together. Students discussed how Chin-Kee symbolizes the common stereotypes some Americans may have toward people who are Chinese and how terrible and inaccurate these stereotypes are for people. The final character

FIGURE 2. Jin wishes he had Caucasian features.

From *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, First Second Books, 2006. Used by permission.

we looked at is Danny, who is Chin-Kee's Caucasian cousin. At the conclusion of the story, we learned that Danny is actually Jin, who has transformed himself into a new person to fit into his white-dominated society. My students identified Danny as being a representation of someone who is unable to reconcile both of his cultures and denies one culture in favor of the other. This causes him to become a different person, one who is not true to himself. At the end of the story, Danny returns to his true form and then shows—like the Monkey King—that happiness comes from being who you are meant to be.

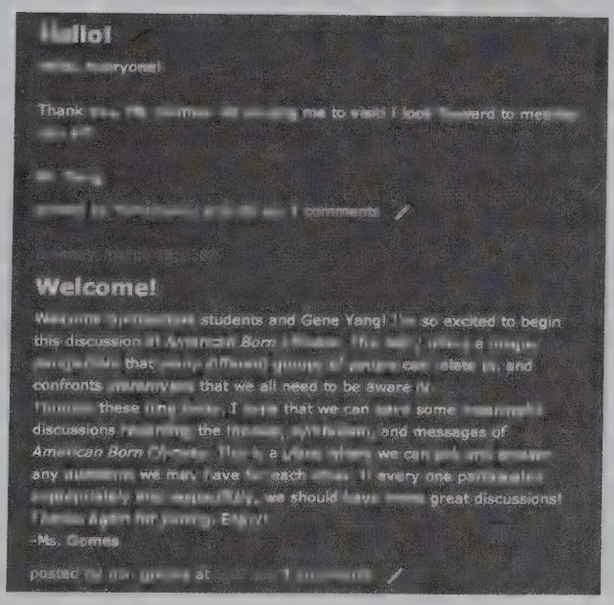
Negotiating Our Sense of Selves: Blogging with Mr. Yang

Although my students and I began having meaningful discussions with each other once we began reading the story, I was initially concerned with the students' ability to relate to Jin. Since my students have disabilities that inhibit their social skills, they often have difficulty relating their personal experiences to the experiences of those around them, how-

ever similar they may be. For example, I saw the situation with Jin and the Monkey King as a parallel to the situations experienced by my students. Like the characters in the story, my students did not believe that they fit in with a typical society and, like Jin, they have been bullied or pigeonholed. My students have also had to figure out where they fit into the world and have had to navigate through a world that often does not accept or understand their differences. I could tell the students did not feel comfortable sharing how their experiences were similar, or they did not possess the expressive oral language skills to communicate such ideas. To address this problem, I decided to integrate a technology that many high school students are comfortable with: online blogs. Using Blogger.com, I created a blog for our class for the discussion of *American Born Chinese.* Once the blog was established, an easy step-by-step process, I posted questions to which my students needed to respond. The students read each other's responses and made comments on what their peers wrote, resulting in a written, online discussion. Figure 3 is an example of the blog.

We are lucky in that Gene Yang resides near our school and understands teachers (being one himself) and students. With the help of a family member who works with Mr. Yang, I asked him if he would be willing to participate in the blog with my students. He enthusiastically agreed and became an integral part of our discussion of the novel. I told the students of his acceptance as soon as I mentioned the blog, and they showed immediate excitement. Our blog remained open throughout the unit, though we closed it at the end of our six weeks. We were lucky to catch Mr. Yang at a time when he was not yet being asked to meet as many publishing deadlines as he is now currently juggling, due to his success as a graphic novelist.[1]

FIGURE 3. Our Blog



In the blog, I posted questions to students about their readings. In turn, students responded to the questions, as did Mr. Yang. What resulted was phenomenal. My students, some of whom had great difficulty creating coherent sentences when speaking aloud, suddenly wrote paragraphs that were insightful and demonstrated a deep awareness of the text and its meanings. In response to the question, "What was something you have wanted to change about yourself?" one student wrote the following:

> my physical strength. I would not run as far as other kids, or do push ups and sit ups the best. But later in 9th grade I realized that I had something that would help me in life much more. The ability to make smart decisions. I figure that knowing how to prevent yourself from getting into a dangerous position and organize your finances is alot more useful than being able to lift 100 pounds. So now I just accept that I probably won't be a physical laborer when I grow up but instead a career that requires you to be smart.

In response to this particular post, Mr. Yang wrote the following:

> I can definitely relate to this. As a child, I was horrible at sports. I lacked both physical strength and coordination. The dodgeball would always find its way to me, no matter how hard I tried to get away, like it was a Gene-magnet or something.
>
> In any case, I've found that my weaknesses have helped make me a more compassionate person. Whenever I start getting impatient with someone who isn't so great at computers (I teach computer science in high school), I try to imagine what it was like for my elementary school PE teachers to try to teach me how to shoot a basketball.

The response above demonstrates to me that, like Jin, this student is negotiating his place in society and solidifying his sense of self. Mr. Yang's personal experience paralleled the student's response, reinforcing the idea that wanting to change who you are is natural, but being yourself is the ultimate discovery. As Mr. Yang shared some of his personal

experiences as an adolescent, I saw that the students were somehow able to open up about their lives, sharing sometimes deeply personal experiences. The format of the blog, though it was not anonymous and all of the students knew who posted each response, provided a degree of physical anonymity and security by allowing students to share through a webpage and not through face-to-face discussion. That so many of them were motivated by technology also helped build their motivation to interact as well. Moreover, my students being able to ask Mr. Yang questions they had about the book and interacting with him built motivation to explore the text and its issues as well. In one blog post, the students asked Mr. Yang if the character of Wei-Chen was based on a real person. Mr. Yang responded:

> When I was in third or fourth grade, a kid a year younger than me moved to our neighborhood from Taiwan. The teachers at my school really, really wanted me to be friends with him, and I really, really didn't, for reasons I didn't understand at the time. He followed me around until I threw tanbark at him to get him to go away.
>
> In a lot of ways, *American Born Chinese* is me working out my guilt from this incident. In the story, Jin is actually much nicer than I was. He actually befriends Wei-Chen.

My students were surprised by Mr. Yang's honesty, which helped them establish a sense of trust among the students, Mr. Yang, and myself. As the blog continued to develop, students became more comfortable bringing up their personal experiences. The blog had become the safe house I desired and they needed. When discussing the theme of wanting to change, one student wrote the following:

> A time that I wanted to change was when I didn't want to be a person who had ADHD. I wanted to be normal and I kept trying to find a way to do it, I searched for a few years, but couldn't find a way to do it. Finally, I guess I just had to accept just who and what I was. Unfortunately, this urge still comes to me once in a great while.

I was surprised—and delighted—by the honesty and vulnerability this teenager with special needs revealed to his classmates. Not only did my students feel safe enough to post personal experiences, but they were also able to connect with Mr. Yang and the experiences of the characters in the book.

By the time we completed the graphic novel, we had made a new friend, established safe houses within contact zones, and shared confident, text-to-self connections with a willing author. Students were motivated to examine his text, his life, their lives, and concepts associated with literature and living. It was incredible to see my students moving through the process of self-discovery and reconciling who they are as teenagers, and who they want to become. We wrapped up the unit with a discussion of the novel's major themes and how it challenged our perceptions. The blog is now closed, remaining as a private archive of our learning and time with Mr. Yang.

Below is a list of some of the discussion prompts I posted to the blog. It is important to remember to use prompts that can generate a good deal of dialogue and target inferential thinking skills:

1. Describe a time when you wanted to be different. Give specific examples and explain why.
2. Jin is told that he can become anything he wants to if he's willing to "forfeit his soul." Throughout the story, we see Jin slowly change into Danny. At which part in the story do you think that Jin first begins to lose his soul? Provide a reason for your answer and textual support.
3. Think about the themes we have discussed in *American Born Chinese:* trying to figure out your identity, coming to terms with and accepting your culture and who you are, etc. Why do you think, as high schoolers, that it is important to read a book like this? Why are these themes important to our lives?

Conclusions and Considerations from Cheryl and Bucky

Although not everyone will have the luxury of having Mr. Yang engage in an online discussion with their students, the students' blog reveals itself as an excellent way for students to participate in a classroom discussion that is free from pressure or judgment, allowing them to build connections to a text at the same time they learn something about themselves. These remarkable students, who have trouble writing in traditional settings, are also experiencing success at what Ladislaus M. Semali and Judith Fueyo call "transmediation." That is, the technological interface has helped them become adept at responding to cultural texts in multiple modes and sign systems:

they've moved beyond the isolation of the page into a newer interface that is more comfortable to them and allows them the agency of personal writing and the "protection" of being a little more removed from their writing than in the traditional mode. This, however, has the deliciously ironic effect of drawing them closer to the interface (blog), their writing, and the writing of their peers. Using the blog enabled the teacher to have relaxed conversations with her students, all while teaching essential inferential thinking skills and asking students to make applications to their experiences. As such, she and her students were exploring what Jamie Myers has called "sociopsychosemiotic literacy" (307). Via shared membership in the blog, students were able to examine instances when they have been misinterpreted by society. They were also able to reflect on how instances affected them. We feel that Blogger.com is an excellent site for educators to use because it allows the teacher to have control over who views and participates in the blog to maintain the safety of the students. Only invited persons have access to the blog, and administrators of the site can delete any inappropriate comments before they are viewed by others.

Some may claim that the class's interaction with Gene Yang or any other author is impossible for many teachers to successfully attempt; therefore, the general applicability of this one class experience is limited. Such assertions, however, fail to consider how new technologies are creating new spaces for people to interact. It has long been an intriguing possibility of having a student's letter sent to an author and then replied to by that author. Now, email and author websites make such interaction easier than ever.[2] Many young adult authors have websites or blogs where they talk about their work and readily accept and respond to comments. Gene Yang's site, Humble Comics (http://www.humblecomics.com), offers contact information and blog posts with comments enabled. Though that doesn't guarantee a reply from the author, it does allow an immediate opportunity for someone to speak directly to the author. For example, Alissa Torres, writer of the graphic novel *American Widow,* recently contacted Bucky to thank him for asking students in a graduate course on teaching the graphic novel to blog about their reactions to her work. Jessica Abel also emailed Bucky to express her thoughts on a student's critique of her graphic novel *La Perdida.* Both of these were instances of unsolicited discourse, instances where the artists made first contact. Although all classes might not achieve the same access to a prize-winning author that Cheryl's class did, the potential these new contact zones hold can take our students far beyond the four walls of conventional English classrooms.

The nature of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 implies that all children will continue to move forward in their education. Students with disabilities who have low reading comprehension face difficulties in all subject areas. Trying to meet the increased standards of education as they move through the grades becomes increasingly difficult if they cannot keep up in their understanding of the written text. Through the use of graphic novels, these students may be helped by using visual representations to help them make sense of the written word. Through their study of *American Born Chinese,* the students mentioned in this article learned essential reading comprehension skills and social skills that will extend beyond the walls of an English classroom.

The message of the story—the age-old adage to "be yourself"—remains as true and powerful as ever. (See fig. 4.) In a world where students feel

FIGURE 4. Learning to Accept One's Identity.

From *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, First Second Books, 2006. Used by permission.

pressured to do the complete opposite, it is inspiring to have a text that communicates this idea in a way students will appreciate and enjoy. What's more, the text and the blog helped these adolescents consider their own identities in an inviting social space, sharing that space with a generous author with whom they could personally connect. This built motivation and sense of self. It was an authentic writing task that provided social interaction beyond physical walls, and it helped challenge compartmentalizing preconceptions of identity.

Editor's Notes

1. For more information on working with young adult authors, please see the January 2009 *English Journal,* themed "Living Authors," especially the articles written by Alleen Pace Nilsen and James Blasingame Jr.; Jennifer Buehler; and Karen E. Moynihan.

2. Many YA authors are inundated with email from students and aren't able to reply to individuals, especially when those emails are parts of required classroom assignments. For information on these issues and on how to successfully engage YA authors, please see the articles in note 1.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

For more ideas on teaching *American Born Chinese,* listen to the ReadWriteThink.org podcast "Teen Identity and Tough Situations." Podcast listeners will not only learn about this and other texts but also hear tips to share with adolescent readers before, during, and after reading this fantastic graphic novel. http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/podcast-episodes/teen-identity-tough-situations-30341.html

Joellen Maples, Katrina Arndt, and Julia M. White

Re-Seeing *The Mighty*: Critically Examining One Film's Representations of Disability in the English Classroom

Students learn to recognize and challenge stereotypical representations of disability in film. They also learn to celebrate difference, and they have an opportunity to make their community more welcoming to people with disabilities.

Films portraying characters with disabilities are often shown in the English classroom. Lenny Small, in *Of Mice and Men,* is presented as "slow" mentally and being of overly large stature. Other characters misunderstand his intentions, focusing on his size and misinterpreting his "simple-mindedness." Simon from *Simon Birch* is physically small and believes he was sent by God to do something wonderful. Simon performs his miracle: he saves a school bus full of young students when the bus slides off an icy road and plunges into a lake. These two films, along with others that English teachers show, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, The Glass Menagerie, Moby Dick, Gattaca,* and *A Beautiful Mind,* often show simplistic and stereotypical representations of characters and their disabilities. Although students are frequently encouraged to think critically about a film's structure, themes, or symbolic elements, we argue that they should also learn to examine critically the representations of disability in these films.[1]

If stereotypical representations of characters with disabilities are not identified and challenged, another generation of people may hold on to outdated and unhealthy assumptions about real people with disabilities. How and why students watch films in class, therefore, is important to examine. In her article in *Learning, Media and Technology,* Renee Hobbs summarizes her survey of elementary and secondary teachers' use of media and technology in the classroom. From six years of observational and interview data, she generated a typology of non-optimal use of video in the classroom, which included the following seven instructional practices: using video with no clearly identified instructional purpose; not using pause, rewind, or review; large-group viewing experiences giving teachers a "break"; teachers mentally disengaging during viewing; using TV viewing as a reward; using media only as an attentional hook; and using video to control student behavior (41–44). She also found that one half of teachers using film adaptations of literary works "included references to the word 'fun,' suggesting that video is a treat or reward after the 'heavy' work of reading literature" (45). As such, viewings with little analysis or reflection may have unintended consequences, sending the message that inaccurate or exaggerated stereotypes about disability are accurate and acceptable (Chervenak 12; Norden 11). Uninformed readings of film may reinforce negative and inaccurate beliefs and stereotypes about disability and may perpetuate stigma status of people with disabilities.

However, teachers can foster engagement and empathy toward differently-abled persons through careful choices and active reading of films (Considine and Baker 25). The Standards for the English Language Arts published jointly by NCTE and IRA support the use of a broad range of texts that include film as students "need opportunities to compare the ways in which ideas and information are presented in different media—for example the ways in which a narrative differs when read, heard, or viewed on

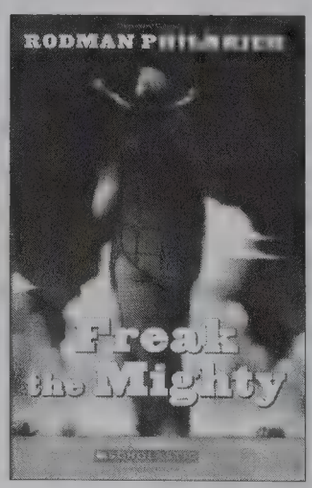
A version of this article originally appeared in *Disability Studies Quarterly* 30.1 (2010). http://dsq-sds.org. Reprinted with permission.

film" (NCTE 11). Yet, it is not merely enough to make comparisons between different media; we must challenge students to analyze critically the texts they view (11). Critical analyses of disability characterizations and the functions they serve in film are necessary to open students' minds to how they think about disability. Learning to read movies with an emphasis on how disability is constructed is an important task for students, given both the increasing visibility of people with disabilities in American society and the increased educational focus of providing access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.

Stereotypic representations of individuals with disabilities in film include those that revolve around pity, innocence, and adventure, often culminating in heroic status.

Regardless of the accuracy of its portrayal of disability, film functions as a major information source on the nature of disabilities (Safran, "The First" 477). Film "reflects and affects our social worldview" (Pavlides 52), including students' perceptions of people with disabilities. While movies entertain, they simultaneously "provide viewers with information about disabilities, and . . . project representations of how individuals fit into a nation's social and political landscape" (Safran, "Movie" 223). These limited conceptualizations are the outcome of attitudes and beliefs that include a fear of disability and pity for people with disabilities.

Our purpose in this article is to show what an active reading of *The Mighty,* a commonly used film by English teachers adapted from Rodman Philbrick's novel *Freak the Mighty,* might look like. *The Mighty* is valuable in that it positively portrays friendships between disabled and nondisabled characters, but the damaging and limited representations of disability that this film offers may perpetuate prevailing stereotypes of disability so that students maintain a stigmatizing viewpoint of persons with disability labels. Drawing from second and third authors' previous work about disability represented in film (Arndt, White, and Chervenak), we extend a critical analysis of *The Mighty.* In what follows, we provide a synopsis of *The Mighty* and then describe an analytical tool—Martin Norden's stereotypic roles—that we think is useful in challenging negative constructions of characters with disabilities in the film. We present Norden's roles and our own critical reading of *The Mighty* as a model for other English teachers to use when "reading" disability in both film and literature. We end with recommendations for teachers on how to approach using film in ways that are respectful of people with disabilities and that are accepting of difference in classrooms.



The Mighty Synopsis

Set in Cincinnati, *The Mighty* is the story of middle school students Max Kane and Kevin Dillon. Max, whose father murdered his mother in front of him, lives with his grandparents and is shy. Physically large for his age, he lumbers through school and is frequently taunted for his difficulty with reading. Kevin is academically gifted and has a physical disability; he uses braces and crutches to walk; he is small for his age and is often ill. At school Kevin is assigned to be Max's peer reading tutor, and the two become friends as Kevin introduces Max to reading about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. They also stand up to the local middle school gang, the Doghouse Boys. Ultimately, Max's father, recently released from prison, kidnaps Max and Kevin rescues him. The film ends with Kevin's death, which is due in part to the stress of the rescue.

Norden's Stereotypic Roles

Stereotypic representations of individuals with disabilities in film include those that revolve around pity, innocence, and adventure, often culminating in heroic status. Norden grounds film critique about disability in his analyses of common representations, including four stereotypic roles that we explore here: the "sweet innocent" (33), "comic misadventurer" (20), the "civilian superstar" or "supercrip" (28), and the "tragic victim" (26).

Norden's "sweet innocent" is a character who inspires pity, like Dickens's Tiny Tim. This character is the one who stumbles through social interactions, misinterprets social cues, and is childlike, even if the role is an adult one.

This "sweet innocent" is far more "reactive than proactive and seem[s] to bring out the protectiveness of every good-hearted able-bodied person who [comes] his or her way" (Norden 33). The second role a character with a disability is often forced into is the "comic misadventurer" (20), a common male role. This role includes providing comic relief and longing for a romantic partner but rarely finding a girlfriend. The third character is the "civilian superstar," or "supercrip," and is the "heroic disabled person" (28) who overcomes his or her disability to accomplish amazing feats or save nondisabled characters. The term "supercrip" is an extension of the term "crip": Eli Clare notes that "I know where *crip* comes from in disability communities—the long histories of folks who have had cripple used against us. We have taken the word into our own mouths, rolled it around, shortened it, spoken it with fondness, humor, irony, recognition" ("Thinking"). Moving beyond "crip" to "supercrip" involves a portrayal of a person with a disability as noted above, as a superstar—therefore becoming a "supercrip."

Sometimes "civilian superstars" become "tragic victims," whose deaths are mired in the heroism of their actions, and viewers are led to believe that their deaths are necessary; as a result, while audiences may weep for the victim, they understand that the disabled character could not possibly remain in the world (Hayes and Black 124–25).

All these conceptualizations function to present disability as a narrative device to advance the plot of a film or to have characters with disabilities serve as saviors of nondisabled characters. This is certainly the case in *The Mighty.*

Critically Reading *The Mighty*

In *The Mighty,* Kevin is constructed as different by those around him. He wants opportunities that he and others in the films believe are afforded only to people without disability. However, the responsibility of seeking out these opportunities is left to him. *The Mighty* provides no critique of prevailing stereotypes about disability; in fact, negative attitudes about difference are reified. For example, at the beginning of the film, Max is teased as having no brain and his coach refers to him as a Neanderthal, while one kid says to his group as Kevin walks into the gym, "Hey, check out the March of Dimes." Without appropriate guidance, students might take this comment as funny, instead of understanding that this is a negative comment that perpetuates a limiting stereotype about people with disabilities as pitiable.

The Mighty reinforces the idea that disability is pitiable and an undesired state of being in statements by Kevin and his mother. In one scene, Kevin is assigned to be Max's reading tutor, and Max states that he will not be able to read text from *King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable* that is assigned to him by Kevin. Kevin, becoming increasingly emotional, states, "You can't? Oh, you will! Or, you might end up in one of those special schools, with kids who can't even say their own names!" In an exchange with the school principal, Kevin's mother asserts that while Kevin lives in a "world of books and words and ideas," he would "trade it all to be normal!" In both of these exchanges, Kevin and his mother reinforce the idea that having a disability is pitiful and negative, creating a fear of disability and presenting a belief that "normal" is preferable to a diverse experience of physical or cognitive disability.

Comic Misadventurers and Sweet Innocents

Inherent in the roles of the "comic misadventurer" and "sweet innocent" are portrayals of characters as comic relief and as asexual innocents. Both of these stereotypic roles are present in *The Mighty,* and while episodes related to this provide comedic release, these scenes are generally viewed with little critique. In this film, the boys with outsider status bond and become best friends. Kevin and Max become "Freak, the Mighty" when Kevin, recognizing that "you need a brain and I need legs," rides on Max's shoulders, becoming, in essence, a knight and Max his steed: two "deficient" boys becoming one "whole" boy. During the beginning and middle of the film, "Freak, the Mighty" roams the seedier

Kevin and Max become "Freak the Mighty" when Kevin rides on Max's shoulders. From *The Mighty*. Dir. Peter Chelsom. Walt Disney, 1998.

streets of Cincinnati doing good deeds, such as breaking up domestic squabbles in diners and returning lost purses.

At some points in the film, the roles of "comic misadventurer" and "sweet innocent" converge. In one scene in *The Mighty,* Kevin is in the lunchroom entertaining the group by playing with his food, putting spaghetti on his eyebrows and head, pretending to be Groucho Marx, Marlon Brando, and a coy girl. An implication is that he cannot possibly expect to get a girlfriend, so he will be the class clown. As the group laughs and responds, he continues, getting uproarious laughter from his peers. As he becomes more and more animated, he starts to cough and choke, and Max carries him to the nurse. He ends up being hospitalized, the innocent who cannot exceed the limits of his frail body. The scene sends several messages: the boy with the disability is entertaining, his humor serves as a substitute for sexuality, and he is fragile. It is revealed that Kevin has Morquio syndrome. This scene clarifies for the audience that Kevin is different—not tuned to the same chronology as his peers, with an urgency born of his awareness that he may not live into adulthood. This is a bleak representation of Morquio syndrome. The National Mucopolysaccharidoses (MPS) Society states that "Disease severity varies significantly for individuals with MPS IV, and it is not possible to predict the expected life span for a given individual. Those on the more slowly progressing end of the disease spectrum may have a reasonably normal lifespan. However, the availability of new and ever-improving treatments as well as other surgical procedures provides hope for better future outcomes for individuals affected by MPS IV" (22). It is possible that Kevin's genetic disorder may have been exaggerated to provide a dramatic turn in the film and to foreshadow his transition from supercrip to tragic hero. Yet, that misinformation has an effect on students' worldviews about people with disabilities and creates erroneous assumptions that must be challenged or corrected by teachers.

Kevin's genetic disorder may have been exaggerated to provide a dramatic turn in the film and to foreshadow his transition from supercrip to tragic hero. Yet, that misinformation has an effect on students' worldviews about people with disabilities and creates erroneous assumptions that must be challenged or corrected by teachers.

Superstars and Tragic Victims

This film includes in its plot development a quest, a building tension around a problem, and the resolution of the problem through Kevin's sacrificing his health, his well-being, and ultimately his life to save someone else. Throughout the film, Kevin recognizes that his life is essentially a quest, which suggests that people with disabilities cannot just be ordinary people living typical lives, but are extraordinary supercrips. Kevin demonstrates this through his obsession with King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable. This obsession foreshadows the climax of the film in which he rescues Max from his abusive father.

Kevin and Max, as the symbiotic "Freak, the Mighty," engage in knightly deeds, which culminate in the central quest of the story: Max is kidnapped by his murderer-father and Kevin, stealing a van and driving it with his crutch, searches for and rescues Max. Kevin is acknowledged as a hero, but his heroism has a price. Kevin, in an unrealistic representation of Morquio syndrome, dies shortly after the rescue of Max because "his heart just got too big for his body." Through Max's friendship with Kevin, Max was also saved. His life was literally saved, and Max became "cured" of his reading disability through his and Kevin's friendship and Kevin's guidance.

The resulting message to students is that the character with a disability only has value insofar as he rescues and redeems the normate characters—Kevin saves Max. Kevin is a "supercrip," who then becomes a tragic victim whose utility ends when his companion is saved—and when that utility ends, he literally dies. In their consideration of disability as a cultural sign, Michael Hayes and Rhonda

Black propose a "reconciliation of confinement," in which institutionalization or other forms of confinement are considered benevolent and protective environments (124). In these films, the reconciliation is even more confining than institutionalization: Kevin dies. The reconciliation from the constraints of his lived experience is one the viewer recognizes and applauds as Kevin is freed from the confinement of his disability through his death.

Reframing Stereotypic Representations

Norden's stereotypic roles serve as a tool for students to critique representations of characters with disabilities and their portrayal in film. Students can be guided to recognize the stereotypic and damaging ways that disability is articulated. In this way, the power that these representations have over students is diminished. Films can then be understood in a deeper context, read as the literature they are meant to reinforce. It is essential that we approach films in ways that allow students to be collectively involved in the active construction of knowledge: to read not only the word or images but also read the world through examining and questioning issues of power and equity in the texts and coming to understand the possibilities for change inherent in this interrogation (Freire).

For example, *The Mighty* uses disability as a major—or even sole—facet of Kevin; it is his disability that drives the plot and informs his role as an innocent and superstar, then, finally, a tragic victim. His death at the end of the movie is almost satisfying when we consider the role of the tragic victim. Viewers are essentially told that Kevin's death is inevitable and necessary. If students are not encouraged to critically explore this narrative, they may feel pity and satisfaction that Kevin redeems his friend, serves his purpose, and then gallantly passes on to a better world. Interrogating this film may allow students to deeply explore the representations of disability in the film.

Another example that can get lost in the film if not critiqued with a critical eye is how Kevin is confined by his physicality and the expectations of others in *The Mighty.* This is confirmed by his mother pleading with the principal to allow him to participate in physical education and by his comments about being mostly alone and finding a refuge in books. He is stymied by his physical limits and is often cautioned by his anxious mother not to overdo. He hopes for rehabilitation in the form of a cure for his syndrome. This is cleverly portrayed through the construction of the "brave sick boy." At one point in the film, Kevin shows Max a "research center," which Max later discovers is an industrial laundry facility. Kevin harbors a secret hope that a cure will be found and he will live to adulthood, a convenient yet inaccurate representation of Morquio syndrome. He is denied this hope, and because he rescues Max, his purpose has been served, and the viewer is satisfied with the resolution: Kevin saves Max, Max emerges from his basement bedroom into full personhood, and Kevin can fade from the film and from life. These representations of disability and the messages about the utility and purpose of people with disabilities in these films can be challenged, and films can provide avenues for teachers to engage their students.

Stephen Safran recommends that teachers use films that accurately portray disability and, ideally, films that feature performers with disabilities who are full members of their communities and who are not portrayed in stereotypical ways.

Recommendations for Using Films That Include People with Disabilities

For teachers to be successful in reframing students' attitudes toward outcomes for characters with disabilities, two elements are necessary; Kyle Chellew notes: "the appropriate selection of films with sympathetic and accurate depictions of characters and situations; and an ongoing examination of the potential consequences of negative imagery on public attitudes" (28). Similarly, Stephen Safran recommends that teachers use films that accurately portray disability and, ideally, films that feature performers with disabilities who are full members of their communities and who are not portrayed in stereotypical ways ("Using Movies" 45). *The Mighty* meets some of these criteria, but this film also articulates the stereotypes of disability representations often perpetuated in Hollywood film.

Not only should teachers avoid choosing films that show inaccurate representations of people with disabilities, they should also resist choosing a narrative that emphasizes overcoming a disability. As Clare

notes, "the dominant story about disability should be about ableism,[2] not the inspirational supercrip crap, the believe-it-or-not disability story" (2). One way to avoid this "supercrip crap" is for teachers to select films with depictions that educate students about individual abilities and societal barriers, and inform students about issues such as "accessibility, sexuality, and independent living" (Safran, "The First" 467). These broad topics can be infused into units of literature study, and students can be taught to view film critically. David Considine and Frank Baker note that "for learning to occur the focus has to shift from what they watch to how they watch" (26).

With those points in mind, we propose that teachers carefully choose and assess any movie used in the classroom, and if the film is even peripherally related to disability, prepare to provide discussion about and critique of disability and stereotypes within the films. Safran provides several considerations in choosing movies to be shown in classrooms, including that the teacher (1) preview films and verify the accuracy of portrayals of disability; (2) choose films that cast people with disabilities as characters with disabilities, that portray people with disabilities as full participants in their communities and schools, that include characters that are fully developed so that disability is embedded in the plot and is not the primary focus; and (3) avoid films that sensationalize or stereotype people with disabilities ("Using Movies" 45). We adapted Safran's tool (see fig. 1) to evaluate film for teachers to help them make decisions about the appropriateness of their choice of film.

Another use of the adapted tool to evaluate film would be to have students fill out the table as they watch a film depicting characters with disability. It provides a framework for students when watching the film and critiquing representations of disabilities. Attention to positive and negative stereotypes and ac-

FIGURE 1. Evaluating Film Representations of Disability

Directions: Write the name of the film below. Then highlight or circle the representations of disability you saw in the film. Give two examples of positive representations and two examples of negative representations.

Film: _____

Positive Representations of Disability	Which representations did you see? Place a check by each representation and record specific example(s).
The person with a disability . . . ▪ has a complex personality with a full range of emotions ▪ interacts as an equal ▪ is part of a mainstream setting with people without disabilities ▪ is portrayed as an ordinary person without superhuman abilities ▪ provides insight into societal barriers ▪ is shown as capable of having relationships	

Negative Representations of Disability	Which representations did you see? Place a check by each representation and record specific example(s).
The person with a disability is portrayed as . . . • pitiable or pathetic • subjected to violence • sinister or evil • superhuman, overcoming all barriers through personal determination • laughable • a burden • nonsexual • living separately from mainstream society	

Source: Adapted from Safran, Stephen. "Using Movies to Teach Students about Disabilities." *Teaching Exceptional Children* 32.3 (2000): 44–47. Print.

tively reading movies in the context of representations of disability can assist students "in unlearning pervasive stereotypes and acquiring new and different ways to view human difference" (Connor and Bejoian 59).

Activity: A Class Credo

We end with an activity that could be used to move beyond a discussion with students about representations of people with disabilities after viewing *The Mighty.* The goal of this activity is to help students take their growing understanding of limiting narratives about disability and translate that new understanding into examining and questioning issues of power and equity in their local reality: their classroom and school. It is important that students move beyond awareness and critique of the representations and stereotypes presented in the films they see. We hope that students will take their awareness and move toward social action within their classrooms and school when it comes to people with disabilities.

In this activity, students will create a classroom credo. To do this, they will view The Credo for Support (Kunc and Van der Klift). See Figure 2 for a printed version of the credo.

FIGURE 2. A Credo for Support

Throughout history, people with physical and mental disabilities have been abandoned at birth, banished from society, used as court jesters, drowned and burned during the Inquisition, gassed in Nazi Germany, and still continue to be segregated, institutionalized, tortured in the name of behavior management, abused, raped, euthanized, and murdered. Now, for the first time, people with disabilities are taking their rightful place as fully contributing citizens. The danger is that we will respond with remediation and benevolence rather then equity and respect. And so, we offer you a credo for support.

'Do not see my disability as a problem. Recognize that my disability is an attribute.'

'Do not see my disability as a deficit. It is you who see me as deviant and helpless.'

'Do not try to fix me because I am not broken. Support me. I can make my contribution to the community in my way.'

'Do not see me as your client. I am your fellow citizen. See me as your neighbor. Remember, none of us can be self-sufficient.'

'Do not try to modify my behavior. Be still and listen. What you define as inappropriate may be my attempt to communicate with you in the only way I can.'

'Do not try to change me, you have no right. Help me learn what I want to know.'

'Do not hide your uncertainty behind "professional" distance. Be a person who listens and does not take my struggle away from me by trying to make it all better.'

'Do not use theories and strategies on me. Be with me. And when we struggle with each other, let me give that rise to self-reflection.'

'Do not try to control me. I have a right to my power as a person. What you call non-compliance or manipulation may actually be the only way I can exert control over my life.'

'Do not teach me to be obedient, submissive, and polite. I need to feel entitled to say no if I am to protect myself.'

'Do not be charitable towards me. The last thing the world needs is another Jerry Lewis. Be my ally against those who exploit me for their own gratification.'

'Do not try to be my friend. Get to know me. We may become friends.'

'Do not help me even if it does make you feel good. Ask me if I need your help. Let me show you how you can best assist me.'

'Do not admire me. A desire to live a full life does not warrant adoration. Respect me, for respect presumes equity.'

'Do not tell, correct and lead. Listen, support and follow.'

'Do not work on me. Work with me.'

'Do not work on me. Work with me.'

'Do not work on me. Work with me.'

Source: Kunc, Norman, and Emma Van der Klift. "A Credo for Support." *normemma.com.* Broad Reach Training and Resources, n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2010. <www.normemma.com/videos/credo-slo.htm>. Reprinted with permission.

The Credo for Support is dedicated to Tracy Latimer who was born with cerebral palsy. National attention in Canada surrounded her father as he was charged with second degree murder in her death. He served a relatively brief sentence in prison and was paroled. Her death sparked much debate over the ethics of euthanasia and the rights of people with disabilities. We explain her story to our students before we show them the video. It is a powerful counter-narrative to the representation of Kevin in *The Mighty* as people with disabilities speak out against common assumptions and stereotypes about disability. Introducing this credo provides a springboard for teachers to discuss stereotypical ways in which disabilities are portrayed in the media as well as their own assumptions.

The Class Credo students create can be about a commitment to inclusive language in the classroom or what types of action the class will take to shift practices that are not supportive to those with disabilities. Not only is this a writing activity that causes students to move from analysis into action, it also serves as an authentic writing project set in a real rhetorical situation.

After reviewing the Credo for Support, students should examine the mission statement of their school and district and have a discussion about inclusive language, support for students with disabilities, and commitment to serving all students. Then, students can assess their daily lives in school and identify how the mission aligns or does not align with their lived experience and their beliefs about disability. Sample questions that may guide their discovery include the following:

- What does the mission statement say about students with disabilities?
- What do you see at our school that matches the mission statement?
- What actions or policies that we have at school match this mission?
- What actions or policies that we have at school do not match this mission?
- What barriers or supports for inclusive attitudes and practices might exist?
- What questions or comments do you have for administrators?

After addressing the school district's mission, students can develop their own Class Credo. To help students with this process, they must begin to understand the ways schools are organized and managed to recognize the underlying sociopolitical issues connected to disability.

The Class Credo students create can be about a commitment to inclusive language in the classroom or what types of action the class will take to shift practices that are not supportive to those with disabilities. Not only is this a writing activity that causes students to move from analysis into action, it also serves as an authentic writing project set in a real rhetorical situation. Writing this credo provides students with an opportunity to write in a real genre to a real audience for a real purpose. A project such as this is directly related to NCTE Standards 4, 7, 9, and 11.

Conclusion

Our hope is that this article helps English teachers consider how disability is presented in film, from narrow and stereotypic representation through more nuanced and complex characterization—if disability is presented at all. Using films in class can expose students to a broader examination of disability representations in popular culture. They can also be read in the context of "social messages" from which students and teachers draw meanings that shape their lives (Bruna 115). We recognize that students can be taught to contest and reexamine the disability stereotypes so prevalent in films used in classrooms. By using film as another text used for analysis, we can facilitate students' reading film in more appropriate ways that affirm and celebrate difference and that challenge the representation of disability. EJ

Notes

1. The authors would like to acknowledge Susan Groenke for her thoughtful and constructive feedback in our process of writing this article.

2. Thomas Hehir defines *ableism* as "society's pervasive negative attitude about disability" that "often makes the world unwelcoming and inaccessible for people with disabilities" (9).

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Cover to Cover: Comparing Books to Movies" invites students to compare and analyze novels and the movies adapted from them. They design new DVD covers and a related insert for the movies, reflecting their response to the movie version. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/cover-cover-comparing-books-1098.html

For additional teaching ideas for *Freak the Mighty* see http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/reading-writing-workshop-freak-41.html.

Nicole E. Green

Teaching (Dis)Abled: Reflections on Teaching, Learning, Power, and Classroom Community

A teacher with a visual impairment describes the challenges she has faced a she developed a successfu pedagogy that centers on shared power and collaboration.

"Good morning," I said on my first day as their teacher. "I don't know if you've all noticed yet or not, but I can't see very well. That means I won't be able to read your papers when printed in 'normal' font, and I likely won't know your names until I learn your voices, and I can't spell, but I'll still insist on writing on the overhead. Any questions?" They blinked at me. Despite weeks of anxious worry over how I would "come out" to my students, my speech came out nothing like the cool, confident, collected, and authoritative one I had planned in my head. Instead it was awkward, fast, and abrupt.

I cannot read the roster with student names on it or recognize students' faces in a crowd. But I am a teacher. I cannot spell, and I struggle to place a comma or semicolon in the correct place. But I am a writer. I cannot read a book. Nor can I find one in the library. But I am a PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition.

Born with a rare form of ocular carcinoma that left me with no vision in my left eye and severely limited vision in my right, I have lived my life precariously balanced between two worlds—too blind for the sighted community and too sighted for the blind community. From this vantage point—first as a student, then as a teacher, and now as a graduate student—I have been able to gain unique perspectives on learning, pedagogy, and, most importantly, the valuable role of student-teacher relationships and classroom community. From my seat in the front row of the classroom I learned about both the discouraging and motivating power of low expectations, the paralyzing fear of being different from my peers, and the frustrations of not being heard by those in power. Simultaneously, though, I saw the remarkable potential for generosity in my fellow students, how a truly dedicated and altruistic educator can change a life, and how writing can give a sense of competence and power to those who feel powerless to change their circumstances.

From my position standing in front of the classroom, I learned even more. I learned about the challenges of finding new ways to do common tasks and about the epic amounts of time it takes to grade student papers that you must squint to read, and how it feels to have my abilities questioned by education department faculty and school staff because of my vision. More importantly, however, I learned about the remarkable adaptability of students, the importance of "seeing" students for who and where they are, and what a powerful effect a sense of community can have on a student's learning.

I Cannot Read, but I Can Learn

As one of the nation's nearly seven million students who received disability services ("Fast Facts"), I struggled, like many, to find my way through a school system that was never entirely sure of what to do with my difference. Unlike many students, at a young age I caught quick glimpses of my teacher's humanity and started to learn early what Brazilian educator and social theorist Paulo Freire knew: "we all know something" (even elementary children); "we are all ignorant of something" (even teachers) (39). As a not quite blind, but most certainly not

sighted, elementary student, I watched as my parents and teachers grappled with defining "fair and reasonable accommodations" per the Americans with Disabilities Act and, though I did not know it then, I began to see the place of Freire in my own education. Arriving home in the evening, explaining to my mother through choking sobs that my fifth-grade teacher had told me she thought "sometimes I just used *it* as an excuse," I learned the importance of trying harder to be "less blind." By middle school, though, I found a place in Mrs. Lyons's English class where I could excel in her many creative and academic writing assignments. Simultaneously, I discovered a refuge in audio books where, though I hung on every word of Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath,* I often had to argue with teachers that in spite of *hearing* my texts, I was *reading* the entire book. In these spaces where my literacy practices became a point of academic contention—with teachers asking my parents and special education faculty, "but can we call listening *reading?*"—I caught my first glimpses of what a knowledge-making community might be. I also learned how one member of that community, who is unwilling to reconceive existing notions of learning or literacy, can bring those attempts at mutual understanding and knowledge-making to a halt.

At the same time, while other students reluctantly slunk off to computer class, twice a week I learned Braille and self-advocacy from a very special special education teacher. In high school, left without a school district-provided vision specialist, I learned to implement those self-advocacy skills I had been given in the years prior and began to forge both troublesome and tremendous relationships with my teachers. A special education and advanced placement student, I watched teachers' pedagogical paradigms shift as they reconciled what they had previously conceived of as two mutually exclusive descriptors. Along the way, though, there were teachers who never forgot to hand me large-print versions of tests and notes, who read my writing for what it said and not how it was spelled, who without a production found clever solutions (which often involved peer collaboration) to chemistry experiments that required an eye for detail, and who were willing to learn with me how to make this "whole school thing work." They saw the potential first and not the problem.

From these 13 years of public education I gathered small lessons—both positive and negative—from teachers who, by including or excluding me as a cogent member of their knowledge-making community, would unwittingly shape my future pedagogy. Four years later, as a first-year student in college, I began to see my teachers' early lessons of classroom community further developed and enacted by university faculty. While perhaps most students would find the chance at a new collegiate identity freeing—for the first time no one would know me as "that girl who can't see"—I did not. I found it terrifying. Until my recent acquisition of a four-legged guide, and due to my stubborn resistance to cane travel, most who did not know me could not tell that I could not see (that is, until they saw me try to read). With the academic bar raised (and the stakes, too) and at a small liberal arts college where disability services (mandated by the ADA) were less than exemplary, I was forced to find my voice. In this environment, without my lifelong advocate (my mother) by my side to read my class texts to me, I had to construct a tenuous patchwork of accommodations that included recorded books for the blind, a network of beneficent fellow-students who offered their eyes and voices to read to me, assistive (but frustrating) technology, some remarkable faculty, and many long nights squinting at texts with a magnifying glass.

In my sophomore year, I elected to take a psychology course in basic learning principles, which involved training rats for Olympic events. To train these rats, we were called on to weigh our rats on an antiquated three-beam balance once a day. I could not read the scale. When I asked my instructor if we could get a digital scale that I could read, he suggested if I could not read the scale, perhaps I should not be in the class. Initially deterred by his implication that my inability to see a scale might directly correlate with my academic capabilities in the course, I learned from him how devastating low expectations can be. After the tears were shed at hearing his assertion, however, I also learned how motivating such low expectations can be. Driven to prove my abilities, and a bit by spite, I earned an A in his class. Thankfully, I was able to transform my indignation over his comment into a determination to succeed, but such ill-informed, off-the-cuff remarks could just as easily have devastating effects on a student's motivation and sense of self-efficacy.

In stark contrast, though, a year earlier, when dropped like the rest of my peers into a first-year seminar, I was horrified to learn that none of the relatively obscure novels for the course were available as audio books. Panicking, and deeply intimidated by the classically academic character who was my professor, I turned reluctantly and nervously to him for help. A week later he arrived in class with six cassette tapes filled with recordings of himself at home reading the texts aloud for me. In the weeks that followed, eight more piles of cassettes appeared, always in time for the assignment. As I listened to him read about Joan of Arc, with his daughter practicing clarinet in the background, I learned about the powerful effect of a teacher who saw the potential and not the problem, who enacted a Freirean pedagogy. That is, he allowed himself to learn something from his student. In so doing, he taught me the value of not just including a student within the learning community but also fully joining it himself.

These educators, dedicated and strong-willed teacher-scholars, taught me to find my voice, stand my ground, and advocate for my education even when the power differential was not in my favor.

Over the years, each semester brought with it new challenges to my academic success: books in German that were not available in audio and were now too long to enlarge and read with my eyes; research projects that required a great deal of culling through sources before the real work could even begin; psychology research that included learning to do statistical analysis on computers with no accessible software; working in the campus writing center where students arrived with papers I could not read; and having to find a way to practica and a student teaching assignment to which I could not drive. With each challenge, though, there was a professor who was willing to problem-solve with me, go to bat and advocate for me, and often provide the accommodations that the university did not. These educators, dedicated and strong-willed teacher-scholars, taught me to find my voice, stand my ground, and advocate for my education even when the power differential was not in my favor. Though they never explicitly taught his texts, they embodied Paulo Freire and his critical pedagogy, which seeks to both educate and empower students.

At the heart of this critical pedagogy are practices that address social and oppressive concerns from within the classroom. Crucial to the enactment of this critical pedagogy, then, is the development of student-teacher relationships that are grounded in ongoing dialogue, shared power, and communal learning. By entering into Freirean dialogue with these faculty members, I lived a lesson in sharing and shifting power.

When things went well and when I was able to learn to my fullest, it was because teachers and educators approached my differences, my disability, and me with a willing desire to learn by sharing power with me and showing their humanity—their not knowing—to me. Between us there was a high degree of mutual respect: respect on my part for the knowledge they had to offer and respect on their part for the lessons I and my disability had to teach them. When things went wrong, and when frustrations mounted, more often than not it was because one of us was not willing to learn what the other had to offer. Educating is not a unidirectional flow of knowledge; it is, instead, a circuit that passes among learners. When I learned and succeeded, it was when I was seen as a member of this knowledge-making and knowledge-offering community, and not as a problem or frustration to be accommodated. These experiences—as both a member of knowledge-making community and as a frustration to be accommodated—would later serve to inform my pedagogy. They taught me that, as theologian and disability studies scholar Robert C. Anderson asserts, "Insights for pedagogy emerge when we consider disability as a valuable source of lived experiences, rather than see disabled bodies as 'something to be accommodated'" (369).

I Cannot Spell, but I Can Teach English

Before I became a certified teacher, as an undergraduate I tested my wobbly pedagogical wings as a Composition I and first year Liberal Arts Seminar student instructor, learning to teach alongside masterful tenured faculty. These early teaching experiences served as my instructional training wheels, allowing me to devise preliminary solutions to issues, such as having to stand in front of a room of students I could not see, not being able to read student essays printed in traditional font, and, hardest of all, initially telling students I could not see.

While student teaching in a local high school, though, the training wheels were soon off, and I was faced with the daunting task of teaching by myself for the first time. With four preps and a debate team to coach, my cooperating teacher was soon glad enough to relieve herself of at least one responsibility, and much to my excitement and terror, I found the composition class fully and entirely dropped in my lap.

Despite the course's initial purpose as a district-designed effort to prepare junior and senior students for college writing, due to changing district writing standards and the inception of a writing assessment, the student population of composition had morphed over the years into a vastly more eclectic group. In addition to fulfilling an English elective credit for students wanting only to jump through their final hoop before graduation, the class also served as an alternative to the district-mandated standardized writing assessment required for graduation. As a result, students brought with them a wide range of writing skills and interests. With only 15 students, the class was small but strikingly diverse—including several unengaged students suffering from serious cases of senioritis, several more with significant learning disabilities, two who were chronic drug users, one student with cerebral palsy, a senior who had immigrated from the Ukraine and did not speak English at home, and two extremely high achieving honors-level students. As the unfortunate guinea pigs of my developing pedagogy, it was in their classroom where theory met practice and Critical Pedagogy met critical students.

On my first day of teaching, it was to this motley group that I had to awkwardly "out" myself as their visually impaired teacher. My confession was met with stares of disinterest or confusion. Humility, which Freire identifies as one of the key attributes of a critical pedagogue, was and is not a choice for me. I did not have to "admit humbly that we are all human beings and, as such, imperfect," because my eyes gave me no other option (60). Over the weeks I called students by the wrong name more often than I'd like to admit, I misspelled common words on the overhead as I tried to teach the conventions of the persuasive essay, I tripped over cords, and I held the attendance roster to my nose to read it. Soon enough, though, I learned the students' voices and knew each of them before they stepped in the room. They learned to ignore and sometimes revel in my spelling errors or offer corrections when they found them distracting, and they heckled me for my clumsiness, just as I did not hesitate to call them out when they napped in the back row or wrote essays that demonstrated little effort. As a class, together we laughed at our imperfections and from this laughter began to form the bonds of a community. Together we had one semester—16 weeks—in which I was to somehow teach them to write, and they were to teach me to teach.

With working-class backgrounds in a school of primarily upper-middle-class students, immigrant roots, severe learning disabilities, troublesome home lives that led to self-medication, and an educational track that played on a loop in their heads telling them they were not good enough, many of the class's students were Freire's disenfranchised learners. When asked if they were writers, several answered no, because they did not "know the rules." For far too long several of these students had not been, as Ira Shor, another critical pedagogue, puts it, "consulted about policy and process in their experience, [and therefore were] denied citizen status as members of a democracy" (31). It seems, however, my flaws, my disability that I could not hide, rendered me often incapable of fully standing on the traditional authoritative pedestal of teacher. Instead, with me in need of their help to make our classroom community function, the students suddenly found themselves installed as contributing citizens of our community. In me, with all my visible failings, these students, for whom school was a daily reminder of *their* imperfections, potentially found the kind of positive role model that Cynthia Ann Bowman and Katherine Barr argue teachers with disabilities can become for both their students and colleagues.

One such student was Erin.

A tall, lanky, red-haired girl who sat in the front row and spent more time drawing in her journal than she did writing in it, Erin hoped only to graduate with her classmates that year. Cerebral palsy combined with a learning disability made fine motor skills, speech production, and writing difficult for her. Story writing, though, was one of her gifts. Unfortunately, creative writing skills provided her with no educational capital in a district that wanted expository and persuasive writing samples from students to declare them worthy of a high school diploma.

Late in the semester I heard that her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting would be held later that day. When I asked my cooperating teacher if I might attend—never having been on the educator's side of the table—she suggested there was no reason or need. I said I'd like to anyway. Sitting in the small conference room at a table with other general education teachers, the speech pathologist, the special education teacher, Erin's mother, and Erin, I recalled *my* "special" yearly teacher meetings, as I thought of them then. I remember being dragged along by my parents to one after-school conference each year and trying to sit quietly while adults talked of goals and outcomes, and I longed to be outside climbing on something. I did not remain a silent bystander to my academic life for long, though. By junior high my parents and teachers were probing me for answers to what strategies helped me learn best. In high school I clumsily struggled to perform a unique balancing act, foreign to most 16-year-olds: trying to more clearly explain my needs to my teachers and help them to hear me, at the same time trying to enact the respect for authority figures deeply engrained in me by my parents. What mattered, though, is that in those meetings I always had a voice, and at a young age I was being invited, as Freire and Shor would argue for, into a knowledge-making community "where all are learners and teachers alike" (Anderson 372).

Surrounded at Erin's IEP meeting by a handful of well-qualified and dedicated educators and Erin's concerned mother, I listened as each of these people talked *about* Erin but rarely *to* her. Erin was talked about, rendering her a non-agent in her academic life.

Surrounded at Erin's IEP meeting by a handful of well-qualified and dedicated educators and Erin's concerned mother, I listened as each of these people talked *about* Erin but rarely *to* her. Erin was talked about, rendering her a non-agent in her academic life. As the meeting progressed, the special education teacher turned to me, in a kind effort to allow me the chance to expand my skills in this new professional setting, and asked how Erin was progressing in composition. I faced Erin and said, "*You* are doing well. We've talked before about *your* writing, do *you* have any questions?" Erin beamed as the others picked their jaws up off the floor, suddenly reminded that in their earnest desire to help, they had lost Erin. They simply had not seen her.

Erin is a person. I am a person. Erin's fine motor skills and speech are impaired, and my eyes are broken. Erin's humanity is not impaired, though, and because I cannot see does not mean that I do not deserve to be heard. The sense of agency—agency over one's own learning and one's own life—that Shor argues is vital to foster both engaged learners and active citizens had been stolen from Erin because she had for so long been seen as broken. On that day, however, as a community of teachers and learners, everyone in that room learned something, and everyone taught something.

I Cannot See a Play, but I Can Teach Shakespeare

As the weeks passed and my cooperating teacher's confidence in my pedagogical skills increased, I was eventually awarded the most highly valued academic real estate in her teaching territory: Honors British Literature. Facing a class filled with 31 college-bound honors-level sophomores and juniors with high expectations for both themselves and their teacher, I found myself again newly nervous to "come out" to these bright but demanding pupils and construct among them a community of learners. With Ivy League dreams and "promising bright futures," honors-level students hold the most academic capital in the school, and even more importantly, they know how to play the game. They know the rules and they are good at playing with and within them. I, with my faulty eyes, inability to spell, and choppy reading aloud, broke the rules. I was not the honors-level teacher they expected, but with an earnest desire to learn and a deeply engrained tendency to follow authority, they suspiciously and tentatively followed my lead.

No better than my first attempt at revelation, my disability and its ramifications for their learning and my teaching abruptly spilled over them on my first day of class. I asked if anyone had any questions. Politely they smiled and looked away. Disability, not to mention a teacher with a DISability, appeared to be something new to them and uncomfortable for all of us. No one was sure of what this ex-AP/special education student, disable-bodied, young teacher teaching bright, eager, honors-level

students would be like. Before long, though, like Brenda Jo Brueggemann, a specialist in rhetoric and composition who writes widely within Disability Studies and is herself hard of hearing, I found myself not in the front of the classroom but having the "tendency to move in on their space" to see (791). Holding Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to my nose and calling on students to read the lines I could not see, I physically and literally left my seat of power in the classroom behind me and moved among them to see their faces, catch their passing notes and occasional snoozes, and, by chance, become part of their learning community.

For these students, Freire's suggested humility from a teacher was entirely foreign. Inclined to ask why they received a 96 on a paper and not a 100, accepting and expecting shortcomings from their teacher and peers was not part of their vocabulary. The first time I showed an overhead on the wall with Elizabethan Theatre notes speckled with typos and misspellings that were inevitable despite my effort to spell-check and copyedit the words I could not see, the class seemed shocked. They would ask, "Ms. Green, what is that word, 'persinium'?" and I would answer, "That would be proscenium, of course." They would giggle and so would I. Before long, Nick, who found such blunders with the English language infinitely distracting, came to the front of the room while I stepped aside, took the pen, and fixed the word. Nick had authority to teach me something, while I taught him that Shakespeare wasn't so scary after all.

For these students, the rules of the game had seemed so clear, but I broke those rules. Like those AP teachers I had years earlier, who wrestled to break down their mutually exclusive categorization of special education and AP, so were my students asked to question the rules they had for so long taken for granted. My vision forced them, initially, to question my credibility as their teacher, because the rules they knew so well told them that to write you must be able to spell and to teach you should know the answers. With time, however, we learned together, as Anderson writes, "the experience of disability has a generative impact on shared teaching and learning. That is, dynamic encounters shape what happens in the classroom . . . [and] such opportunities reinforce interdependence between disabled and non-disabled learners" (373). Many of these honors students, for whom independence is often a paramount value, chose collaboration over independent work on large-scale projects, despite the more labor-intensive nature of the collaborative work. Their work together grew to exemplify Anderson's notion that disability can not only help to establish a sense of community within the classroom but can also deepen "levels of trust and exploration among the learners" (375).

I Need Help, but I Am Not Helpless

All my life, as a student—as a student with a disability—I have heard the following advice as both an accusation and as a kind gesture: "You need to be more independent." The myth of independence is one deeply rooted in American culture. We are the land of the rugged Lone Ranger, the entrepreneurial Daddy Warbucks, and the strong, solo Superman. This intense drive to "make it on our own," like most deeply rooted social and cultural myths, has trickled down to and in many ways intensified in our educational system, where collaboration is sometimes seen as a five-syllable word for cheating, and where the high school football team has only one MVP and high school graduation has only one valedictorian. Within this cultural context, it is no wonder that students (and the general population) with disabilities are expected to find their way to independence.

The truth, though, is that this independence is a myth. No matter how much we'd like to fancy ourselves self-sufficient self-starters, few of us likely could go it alone. Whether able-bodied or disabled, we are dependent on the support of those around us; it is the reason we have families, live in communities, and build cities. In spite of our daily connection to and dependence on our social communities, we are quick to forget this reality of humanity in the classroom. We build walls of authority and expertise on the other side of which our students sit. Because of my vision, though, I was unable to see that wall and was incapable of staying on the "right" side of it. I need my students as much as they need me.

Brueggemann argues that "[d]isability can create knowledge, open doors wider, build ramps to awareness that we all essentially have in us anyway. This happens when any body leads anybody" (800). Just as her faulty ears help connect her to

her students, so do my broken eyes draw me closer to mine. Rather than serving as the immovable barrier that it has occasionally been characterized as, my disability functions in the classroom instead as a unique ability to help foster a classroom community.

My pedagogy, however, is still young and my teaching growing; consequently, not every student left my classroom feeling connected and empowered by the sense of community I tried to build. My intention is not to put words or thoughts in the mouths and minds of my students and assert that they felt as I did about the classroom experience; I wish instead only to suggest a reconsideration of our classroom paradigm—a reconsideration that my disability mandated for me—and echo Anderson who argues that "reconceptualizing difference exposes how *power* harnesses culture to shape the way people see themselves and each other" (371; italics in original).

Rather than serving as the immovable barrier that it has occasionally been characterized as, my disability functions in the classroom instead as a unique ability to help foster a classroom community.

In the end, what my experience serves to support is Bowman and Barr's assertion that "[s]tudents of teachers with disabilities report greater opportunity to take on responsibility than they might have with other teachers" (255). This ability to take responsibility can create a sense of agency and can support Shor's suggestion that, when "sharing authority and assuming teacherly roles, students take greater responsibilities for their educations, which can translate into a more intense relationship between them and the learning process" (199). This "intense relationship," then, becomes a classroom sense of community—a community that all learners and all teachers can benefit from. As teachers, whether we are able-bodied or not, we are called to see our students, to hear them, and to walk with them, because as my students taught me through their willingness to both follow me and take the lead, we are stronger, smarter, and better equipped to learn as a "we" than any one of us ever was as an "I."

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"A Significant Influence: Describing an Important Teacher in Your Life" invites students to write tributes to teachers who have made a profound difference in their lives and then publish their work in a class collection. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/significant-influence-describing-important-824.html

Meadow Sherrill Graham and Sheila Benson

A Springboard Rather Than a Bridge: Diving into Multimodal Literacy

Preservice teachers design practical applications of "new literacies" theories, which include attention to visual, spatial, gestural, audio, and linguistic modes.

In our experience as teacher educators, many preservice teachers view literacy as a print-bound process. With multimodal literacy becoming more important as many states push for 21st-century learning standards, we are always looking for ways to help students break their concepts of literacy away from the printed page. As we worked to incorporate new literacies into our literacy methods courses, however, we realized that we lacked accessible resources for preservice teachers. Too many of the new literacies articles emphasize theory over classroom application. This gap between theory and application led us to consider how to break down many new literacies concepts into manageable bits as we sought to introduce them to our students. This article is the result of those efforts to explain, familiarize, and apply multimodal concepts with preservice teachers. Meadow works with preservice teachers at the elementary level (K–5) and Sheila works with preservice teachers at the middle school and secondary levels (grade 6–adult). In this article we provide an overview of key multimodal concepts we have introduced to our students, and then we describe two assignments we have designed to encourage preservice teachers to push against the print-based text definition so prevalent in language arts. We see these assignments as starting points for a much broader conversation that should happen across content areas.

Multimodality 101

Current discussions of multimodality stem from the New London Group's concept of multiliteracies. As text has increasingly become defined in nonprint forms (e.g., film, photography, websites), multiliteracies is an effort to shift conversations about literacy instruction from thinking about literacy as a static body of knowledge to thinking about literacy as a process of active critical thinking. The New London Group listed four pedagogical elements that needed to be present within a multiliteracies approach: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (31).

For example, a teacher wishing to implement a multiliteracies pedagogy might begin by asking students to gather examples of film clips that employ the same dialect students themselves use (situated practice). Once these examples are gathered, the teacher might talk with the class about how linguistic and social definitions of dialects differ, with a particular emphasis on how certain dialects often become stigmatized (overt instruction). This discussion of different perceptions of dialects could lead into an exploration with the students of why such stigmas exist and how students might respond to the stigmas (critical framing). Finally, students might analyze their beliefs about dialect stigmas and, based on what they have learned, develop some specific steps they can take to communicate their newfound knowledge about the linguistic equality of dialects to another audience (transformed practice).

Such a focus on process rather than product alone is also seen in a second key concept within the new literacies/multimodal world: the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. While on a surface level this concept refers to electronic updates of the Internet, Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel use

the concept metaphorically to refer to shifts in how knowledge is produced and valued. Web 1.0 technologies refer to a closed body of knowledge and a hierarchical structure for producing and evaluating the worth of knowledge (e.g., Dictionary.com). Web 2.0 technologies, in contrast, emphasize group participation in the creation of knowledge (e.g., Wikipedia). Instead of knowledge being controlled by experts, in Web 2.0 multiple participants create knowledge together. As Lankshear and Knobel explain in their 2007 book on new literacies, Web 2.0 "celebrates inclusion (everyone in), mass participation, distributed expertise, valid and rewardable roles for all who pitch in" (18). As with the larger goal of multiliteracies, the emphasis is on thinking in as many ways as possible and including as many people as possible in the process rather than mastering a set body of knowledge. Everyone can contribute.

The students were required to engage in multiple viewings of one episode of a TV show and use the Internet to locate other sources providing information about the episode. Other sources could be episode commentary, summaries, transcripts, shooting scripts, online discussions of the episode, and interviews with actors/directors.

Multimodal Analysis

Multiliteracies is a *theory* rather than a lock-step method. Multiliteracies-based instruction focuses on how various semiotic modes, or sign-making systems, enable students to access meaning. Many teachers assign art, film, drama, and other nonprint-based design activities in their classrooms without helping students explore how such modes can help students critique their current situation and find ways to transform it. For example, rather than simply watching a film adaptation of a novel, students would analyze the new interpretive meanings opened by the film genre. The point is to emphasize the differences in thinking available across modes rather than the final product. There are a number of different modes through which multiliteracies can be understood and analyzed: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial. These modes work together (multimodal analysis) to make viewers feel or believe certain ideas, which the author of the text wanted them to understand, frequently in an almost subliminal way.

Applications with Preservice Teachers

Setting

With these understandings in mind, we designed projects that required students to engage with multimodality and its classroom applications. We teach in a large land-grant university, in a poor, rural, Appalachian state. Over the past year, the state has adopted new "21st century" skills curriculum standards that incorporate multimodality into a Web 2.0 philosophy. In reality, our students generally see a Web 1.0 philosophy modeled in the schools (for example, looking up facts on a website). To help students develop a Web 2.0 philosophy (creating knowledge rather than simply gathering it), we each piloted a project in one literacy methods course. Meadow situated hers in a reading in the content area course, designed specifically for elementary preservice teachers, while Sheila included her project in a secondary literature methods course for preservice teachers of English. Students generally take these courses the semester before student teaching.

Multimodal Analysis Project

Meadow's assignment focused on helping students gain experience with multimodality. In the multimodal analysis project, the students chose a television show to analyze along the multiple design modes. The students were required to engage in multiple viewings of one episode of a TV show and use the Internet to locate other sources providing information about the episode. Other sources could be episode commentary, summaries, transcripts, shooting scripts, online discussions of the episode, and interviews with actors/directors. The students then looked carefully across all the different sources and considered the different modes of meaning to develop a true understanding of the multimodal impact of the episode. Some of the popular television shows that Meadow's students chose to analyze were *The Office, That 70's Show, One Tree Hill,* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* She did not give students extensive instructions but rather provided them with a brief overview of the modes to guide their analysis. Students turned in short written reports outlining what they found, focusing specifically on multimodal analysis. Additionally, they did a presentation of their work for the class using PowerPoint; most students included multimodal aspects

into these oral presentations as well. Looking across their projects, Meadow found that students developed new understandings of each of the different modes as they analyzed the familiar mediums, and her students enjoyed the project.

Here, we explain the different modes in detail using examples from preservice teacher projects as illustrations for each mode.

Linguistic mode. The linguistic mode focuses on the delivery of the spoken word as well as actual content and the structure of the words: Are they organized and cohesive? *Gilmore Girls* provided a great example of this, as the show was noted for its extensive, fast, and quirky dialogue, which contained many tangents and multiple pop-culture references. Nevertheless, Caroline noted that the characters did follow a recognizable train of thought and made reasonably logical conclusions.

Audio mode. The audio mode focuses on music and sound effects. Regina particularly noticed that certain shows, such as *The Office,* don't use a sound track of music, while Noelle saw that in *One Tree Hill,* popular music plays an important role in the show, setting the mood and tone while also frequently advancing the careers of new indie musicians. Additional sound effects common to TV shows included sounds that cued new scenes, which became known to the viewer and acted as markers of topic changes, much like headings in traditional texts.

Spatial mode. The spatial design mode considers how the use of space influences viewer experience. *The Office* provided a great example, as Lana and Kyra realized that the set was designed to reflect each character's personality through the tchotchkes on their desk, even as the overall set was organized as a typical office. Lana and Kyra noted that this arrangement was important because it illustrated how all office members have their own space, yet their work is highly affected by those around them because there are few or no walls. The placement of actors is also part of spatial design, demonstrating the relationships between the characters.

Gestural mode. The gestural mode focuses on the actions of the actors. This includes body language, emotion, and attraction. Eliza noted that the gestural mode was particularly evident in *That 70's Show,* in which gestures showed viewers not only how characters felt but also defined relationships. In the episode she analyzed, "I Can't Quit You, Babe," two characters (Hyde and Jackie) are caught in a secret relationship (kissing on the couch), which causes their friends, Eric and Donna, to be greatly uncomfortable, which is mostly conveyed through their gestures. Eric and Donna stop short as they walk in the door and then refuse to sit down with Jackie and Hyde, conveying that Jackie and Hyde's actions are so beyond the pale, they cannot even mildly endorse this new relationship by sitting in the same room and chatting.

Visual mode. The visual design mode focuses on the way things look. In a TV show, this also includes the camera angles, which manipulate the viewers' perspective. In the above example from *That 70's Show,* when Jackie and Hyde are caught making out on the couch, Eliza noted that the scene is shot not from a typical outside audience perspective, like most sit-coms and most of *That 70's Show.* Rather, the scene is shot from the perspective of Eric and Donna, who open the basement door and all they see (besides the appropriately orange 1970s couch) is Jackie and Hyde kissing. The camera angle ensures that the viewer shares Eric's and Donna's surprise.

Multimodal design. Finally, the multimodal aspect of the analysis considers how all the modes work together to create overall summative meaning. This mode was the most difficult for Meadow's students. Many of them recognized and then noted that without any one of the modes, the TV episode would not have been as rich, but few were able to determine larger meaning. Kylie, however, analyzing the particularly intense episode of *One Tree Hill,* "With Tired Eyes, Tired Minds, Tired Souls, We Slept," did a better job than most. In this episode, there was a school shooting. She noted how each of the modes was used in specific ways to make the viewer feel and understand the intense mood of the episode. Conversations were short, terse, and wrought with emotion. The music was chosen carefully to evoke fear, suspense, and emotional bonds in the characters, whose feelings were reflected by the viewers. Obviously, the gestures supported the premise, as the shooter was desperate, and the hostage students were panicked. Spatial design was shown as the hostage students clustered together while the shooter held himself apart from the rest of the characters. Kylie realized this sent a larger message about school friendships and relationships to

viewers, as well as messages about bullying and taking care of those you love.

Media Instruction Plan Project

As an effort to extend the conversation about multimodalities into preservice teachers' planning for their future classrooms and developing a Web 2.0 philosophy, Sheila required her students to create a media instruction plan for their future classrooms that included a philosophy and practical applications. To make students think beyond surface-level media usage, they answered a series of questions designed to help them incorporate multimodality and Web 2.0 into their philosophy. Once students had their multimodal philosophy in place, they applied it to designing instruction for a short story. Sheila purposely chose a short story ("Lose Now, Pay Later" by Carol Farley) that played with what might happen if consumers let media claims overpower their common sense. Students considered what activities they would have their own students complete in connection with reading the short story and also decided how such activities would be assessed. They designed units to foster audience awareness: to help students understand genre convention differences across modes and to weave multimodality across a curriculum rather than create a token media unit. In addition to describing each activity, these preservice teachers explained their purpose for using the activity, reinforcing connections with their overall teaching philosophy outlined in the first part of the plan.

Once they moved past their initial skepticism, Sheila's students embraced the freedom this assignment allowed. Activities included tweeting about the short story, designing websites and infomercials, and using SimCity to create a society parallel to the one in the short story. Anne designed an assignment requiring students to manipulate images of celebrities to create a "perfect" person. Jen drew parallels between the short story and the Disney film *WALL-E,* asking her students to use both texts to think through potential drawbacks of products intended to make life simpler and then design their own product that would take unanticipated consequences into account.

Final products emphasized critical thinking, congruent with a Web 2.0 philosophy, and also emphasized use of multiple modes to create meaning. Angela stated that "there must be a constant balance between content knowledge and the use of nonprint media in my classroom." She wanted her future students to use media as a tool to both critique current societal practices and create responses to those critiques.

All media plans included some type of nonprint-based product. The products clustered around certain ideas, with advertisements and infomercials being the most prevalent. Almost every project included some sort of activity requiring analysis of how media are used for persuasive purposes, leading to the creation of short films, advertisements, or websites that would persuade others to buy the product. Several final media plans also involved blogging about initial reactions to the story or from a character's perspective.

What We Learned

Meadow's assignment, while effective in building students' awareness of multimodal analysis, did not push them to bridge the gap between knowledge and implementing instruction. The preservice teachers did a good job of identifying the modes, but they struggled with multimodal analysis. In other words, they could spot the different modes, but they couldn't analyze why they mattered. Therefore, Meadow realized the need to pair this assignment with more in-class instruction. While students have personal experience working with multimodal texts in their lives, taking them into the classroom requires a different level of thinking. Many students found it strange (though enjoyable) to watch their favorite television shows through a different lens but failed to truly develop a Web 2.0 philosophy.

Sheila recognized a similar problem. While Sheila was encouraging students to move beyond a print mode in their thinking about language arts instruction, she had not explicitly taught any multimodal theory in class. Numerous conversations were held about how print-based texts are one meaning-making mode among many, and one of the major themes of the course was to closely examine how text is defined in a language arts class. However, none of the course readings addressed modes in the way Meadow addressed them with her students. Students liked using nonprint texts but only as a supplement to their regular lessons, not as the main focus of analysis.

Almost all students wrote about 21st-century children's preference for learning through electronic modes rather than through printed ones. Nonprint modes could be used as a bridge from students' personal experiences and learning preferences to the print-based learning preferences valued in school. Few students reflected on the possibility that the type of thinking fostered in print-based modes might differ from the thinking fostered in nonprint-based modes. This is not to say that they were hostile to the idea; it just hadn't occurred to them yet. This media plan assignment granted students permission to think about nonprint texts in their own curricula, and that in itself was a huge step.

A Springboard Rather Than a Bridge

We do not pretend that a media plan or a multimodal analysis, particularly when created in the abstract before students have gained extensive teaching experience, is a magic pill that will somehow resolve all issues related to multimodal instruction. We do not pretend that every student embraces the idea of multimodality. Preservice students face heavy resistance in their school placements, including host teachers who require them to teach only from a designated section of a basal or literature anthology. Language arts has traditionally been seen by many teachers as involving only written language—words—with perhaps a speech unit or a video unit thrown in near the end of the year. These assignments, however, encourage students to think beyond print, to see language arts as involving a wider range of options than they have previously considered. We are trying to blur lines and show students that it's permissible, even desirable, to cross boundaries.

Preservice teachers must learn not to expect nonprint texts to do what print texts do. The assignments we've described in this article are first steps to a broader mindset for approaching literacy practices. Now that our preservice teachers have waded into the waters of new literacies, they are ready to dive in and try more complex implementations and examine why they are using them.

These new teachers can be supported in this by practicing teachers who are open to examining multimodal literacies in their own classrooms. In many states, this framework is already in place, at least nominally. Literacy organizations such as NCTE also have embedded these ideas into their standards for teachers ("Position Statement on Multimodal Literacies"). Teachers can support incoming educators by critically examining their own practice in light of multimodality, reflecting on how multimodal and print-based texts work together to produce knowledge. Doing so will support the multimodal, networked knowledge production required to function in today's world. EJ

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"It's My Life: Multimodal Autobiography Project" asks students to express themselves verbally, visually, and musically by creating multimodal autobiographies, exchanging ideas with other students, and sharing important events in their lives through PowerPoint presentations. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/life-multimodal-autobiography-project-1051.html

Carolyn Ariella Sofia

Bringing Lessons from Homeschool to the Writing Classroom

A teacher uses her son's talents to teach him new skills and in the process learns something about teaching all students.

A few years into my teaching career I was sitting in a local restaurant at sundown across the table from my five-year-old son. Having been warned several times not to touch the candle in the middle of the table, Joel could nevertheless not stop himself from leaning forward and blowing it out. Rather than look at my face for a reaction, he glanced out the window at the orange-tinged horizon and exclaimed, "The flame was the sun going down, and the smoke was like clouds." My joy at this poetic announcement was short-lived because when he entered elementary school, the poet got knocked out of him. When the class zigged right, he zagged left. He couldn't figure out what school wanted from him and therefore wanted none of it. A few weeks into first grade his private-school principal called and told me not to bring him back the next day. My son, he explained, had walked out of the school building that morning on his own and headed toward a busy street. He advised me to put him in public school where there would be more services. *Services,* we would learn, was code for "something's wrong with your son, but don't worry. We'll try to fix it." Thirty-six hours later he was back in kindergarten, this time in public school, with a one-on-one aide, a school social worker, and a psychologist following his progress. Six weeks later he was a kindergarten student with a tested IQ of 130 and a diagnosis that situated him on the edge of the autistic spectrum.

The next three years are a blur in memory except for the faces of school personnel registering disbelief when I told them that my son behaved relatively well at home. None had answers for me about why such a bright boy was behind in reading, spelling, and math. The only topic they ever seemed to want to discuss was his unpredictable behavior. Third grade became a crisis point when one teacher assured me that throughout her decades of teaching, my son was the first child ever to refuse to comply with her directions in the classroom. One afternoon I was called to school because he had climbed to the top of the monkey bars during recess and was still there an hour later. The principal was standing in an otherwise empty playground unsuccessfully cajoling him to come down. When he heard me call his name, Joel looked at the movements of my raised hand—five fingers, four, three, two, one—and immediately climbed down. This hand signal was the transition warning he had been taught as a toddler when we visited the park and he needed to know we would be leaving soon. A few weeks later he was spinning round and round in the principal's chair when I arrived, while the principal, his teacher, and the school psychologist stood on the opposite side of the desk pleading with him to stop. I got his attention and told him to get up. He vacated her chair immediately.

Getting anyone's attention is a prerequisite for being able to hold a good conversation with him or her, as anyone who parents or works with preteens or teenagers knows. It is absolutely necessary with individuals on the autistic spectrum because the achievement of what is called "joint attention" (the ability of children to respond to another person's request for shared attention or to request it themselves) is one of the skill deficiencies in people

on the autism spectrum (Taylor and Hoch 377). Years of parenting taught me how to get Joel's attention about family matters, but what was happening at school highlighted the difficulties between him and his educators in ways that affected his classroom behavior. I want to share what Joel and I learned about his needs and the needs of other children because it may shed light on helpful teaching practices in middle school, high school, and beyond, not only for students on the spectrum but other students as well. The achievement of joint attention—where two people communicate together about something—lies, after all, at the heart of academic life.

Keeping the attention of an entire class is a crucial skill new teachers must learn. Every instructor from kindergarten to college knows how hard it is to manage a class well when students are marching to the sound of their own drummer. A natural desire in such a situation is to shape that out-of-step student's behavior closer to what everyone else is doing, even if, as in the case of my son, the student's nature is to be different. Unfortunately, this instinct to control can have unintended consequences. When an educator uses student compliance as the measuring stick of whether a class is successful or not, vulnerable students will pay the price because their lack of compliance will mobilize feelings of fear and anger in the teacher. Such alarm and dissatisfaction can lead to a persistent note of criticism, creating what Kris Gutierrez, Betsy Rymes, and Joanne Larson call a "counterscript" (qtd. in Wiebe Berry 495). Counterscripts are sets of unintended messages sent to students—particularly those who most need differentiated instruction. A teacher with a conscious goal of valuing each student may nevertheless unintentionally send a message that sameness counts more than individuality. This demand for sameness actually hurts students at both ends of the spectrum: gifted students can become bored because they need more variety, while students with learning disabilities can become frustrated. Some students have both exceptionalities: they are gifted but have specific learning disabilities. In this case a counterscript can develop when recognition of the gifted side brings with it a concomitant, but erroneous, belief that laziness is at the root of lackluster work rather than an undiagnosed learning disability. A teacher can give up on such a student, feeling the lack of progress is his fault. As a result, "many students who are gifted/LD develop low self-concepts after starting school" (Swesson 24). This dynamic happened in my son's case and caused him a great deal of pain. It was especially evident on the day he disclosed that his teacher had literally moved his desk into the hallway and left his aide to scuttle back and forth into the room to get his work. Sameness was achieved inside the classroom, but at the expense of the child in the hallway.

Because an adult's behavior toward a particular student models how other students should treat him or her, the social consequences for such actions by a teacher are severe for the child in question. Such conduct models a way for other students to exclude a learner. Ironically, my son had always been a self-motivated student. He needed someone who would listen, observe, and figure out his learning style, as well as explicitly decode the school process for him. Many students with learning disabilities, in fact, need social situations to be explicitly taught in the same way they need their lessons to be explicitly taught. Because these needs were not getting met, I decided to do something radical: In consultation with a certified teacher who would supervise us, I withdrew him from school for fourth grade. That year I became his teacher. Our relationship would end up changing my teaching style in a way that made me much more effective in my college writing classroom.

Coming Home to School

Summer preparation for homeschooling filled our house with books, Internet research, hope, and nervousness. While my son was splashing in the community pool with his siblings, I sat under a beach umbrella perusing workbooks such as Nancy Hall's *Explode the Code* series to improve his phonemic awareness, or reading books and articles about the theoretical frameworks of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and John Holt, the latter a seasoned professional teacher who believed that learning is less the product of teaching than the product of the activity of the student, and whose books are now considered among the founding texts of America's homeschooling movement. Under the umbrella by the pool, I plowed through material targeted explicitly for

homeschoolers and delved into articles about autism. Monitoring Internet sites of publishers who supplied the textbooks for the classrooms in our neighborhood helped me understand the norms of our school district. By the end of the summer I was mentally calling our homeschool "A Mind at a Time," after Mel Levine's book, which emphasizes the notion that it is better for educators to be "splitters" instead of "lumpers," i.e., to be people who understand that "kids have more differences than resemblances" (46). My son was calling fourth grade "The Year of Our Experiment." Personnel at the local school district office where I had to submit outlines and assessment paperwork for our plan were undoubtedly referring to it as "The Year of Living Dangerously."

In the end, fourth grade proved to be a watershed year for my son and me. He got the undivided attention of a teacher who understood he had learning disabilities, but who also saw evidence of intellectual gifts. I got an opportunity to observe behaviors that helped and hindered him in the classroom and to develop a new teaching metaphor that pushed my own classroom further along the continuum of inclusiveness. By taking him to my university classes and using what happened there as real-life lessons, I was able to instruct him in what is called the "hidden curriculum" in school: "the do's and don'ts [that] are not spelled out for everyday behavior, but somehow everyone knows about them" (Bieber, qtd. in Myles and Simpson 280). Needing to teach explicitly the social expectation that a student should not talk to another student when the teacher is talking seems ridiculous to a person who can intuit social rules, but a child like him actually needed someone to teach this rule. Then we threw out the notion of "disability" in favor of "learning differences" because, as my now 16-year-old son says, "being labeled makes people approach you in a way that limits how they see you." In significant ways he is right. Professors of education Ray McDermott and Hervé Varenne phrase our complaint more academically: "Common sense allows that persons unable to handle a difficult problem can be labeled 'disabled.' Social analysis shows that being labeled often invites a public response that multiplies the difficulties facing the seemingly unable. Cultural analysis shows that 'disability' refers most precisely to inadequate performances only on tasks that are arbitrarily circumscribed from daily life. Disabilities are less the property of persons than they are moments in a cultural focus. Everyone in any culture is subject to being labeled and disabled" (324). Our work that year therefore involved learning about the "powers of culture to disable" (327). All of us know that not only social expectations but also intellectual ideas must be taught explicitly for some students; left on their own they will not intuit what we want them to notice and learn. This idea became most clear to me in math, as I saw how poor Joel's number sense was and how some institutional practices had worked to keep it that way.

We threw out the notion of "disability" in favor of "learning differences" because, as my now 16-year-old son says, "being labeled makes people approach you in a way that limits how they see you."

Assumptions about Learning

As we worked together, I began to wonder why number and time lines in our country traditionally run east and west instead of north and south. How confusing this was for a child who had east/west confusion even with letters: by fourth grade Joel still confused *b* with *d* and *p* with *q*. So we read together about the history of number lines and found out that ancient Egyptian builders had left evidence of early number lines as marks chiseled at cubit intervals above and below a zero point reference line. After the invention of the printing press, however, number lines presented in books were drawn on an east/west axis. Number lines going left and right, in other words, made a lot of sense in a world where text was read and printed on a horizontal plane. However, it should not have been surprising that the north/south orientation made more sense to my son. East/west number lines, after all, do not always mirror real life. The concept of *more* or *less* is probably learned along a vertical axis. Consider the scene of a parent holding a pitcher of juice in front of a toddler's cup and asking "More?" A young child with even minimal language comprehension will expect that if she signals "yes" to the question, then the liquid in the glass will move upwards, not down, and certainly not horizontally as the parent refills the cup. It was hard not to conclude that part

of Joel's math issues derived from the fact that math teaching is couched within a tradition of literacy based on the horizontal position of printed reading lines, and that Joel was the kind of child who could not intuit the change from the vertical axis he understood. Number lines that fit well in textbooks work for a majority of children, but not all. If a teacher wants to ensure that the concept of *more* and *less* reaches all students, then the vertical number line should be taught. Real life models should be taught, in other words, before abstract concepts.

There are related examples in English language arts. Mind maps (organizational tools in early grades that look like spiny fish or windmills, and end up as plain circles and lines in middle school and high school) help most young students see closeness or distance relationships between or among ideas. These simplified mind maps accomplish this goal in a two-dimensional format, however—one that may not appeal to all youngsters, especially those with difficulty in theorizing about abstract concepts. In writing classes we talk about supporting arguments, but "support" is harder to teach or visualize on a flat surface. However, by developing a metaphor based in three-dimensional life and claiming that an argument is like a stool—the claim sits on top and the supporting claims are the legs that hold it up—almost any student who has ever sat down on a wobbly stool will viscerally understand the meaning of support. Such a metaphor mimics students' developed understanding of how their bodies move through space, thereby linking what they already know to something they are trying to learn, an effective technique for anyone.

Collaboration and Visual Thinking

Capturing the attention of a student also involves, to a large extent, a collaborative model of learning. Because of the miserable time he had in school, Joel and I decided our learning would have to be fun and of high interest for him, a principle in the theory of "unschooling" as taught by John Holt. Unschooling starts from the premise that all children want to learn, and a parent-as-teacher role in this process is simply to provide them with an educationally enriched environment and then follow their lead. Joel was angry about what had happened in third grade, so we read books in tandem that poked fun at school such as Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and Dav Pilkey's *Captain Underpants.* Joel thought in pictures, as many individuals on the autistic spectrum do, and could create compelling narratives with cartoon strips. Instead of telling him that drawing was inappropriate, as he had been told frequently in school when he drew on the margins of worksheets, I encouraged him to draw pictures to accompany various lessons. He then produced a set of pencil drawings to accompany our tandem reading of George Selden and Garth Williams's *The Cricket in Times Square.*

During that year the two of us also became collaborators in a book about vowels: I wrote text to help him visualize letter positions and Joel provided illustrations. His developing sense of humor is evident in the frame for an illustration called "Oscar English wrote a Poem," which he created on a computer paint program (see fig. 1). Joel accompanied me to my college writing classes that year. What is wonderful about this drawing is the way it shows how he internalized the values of my classroom. By the placement of his hand on his chin and the expression on his face, Oscar is obviously deep in thought. He has several quills at the ready for his work and clearly knows that prewriting and revision are part of the writing process—witness the pile of scrap parchment filling the wastebasket and spilling onto the floor. All those crumpled papers on the floor, Joel told me, were evidence that Oscar wanted to make his writing as good as possible.

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As my son engaged himself in this type of work, he began to enjoy learning again. This mood change was due in part, I think, to the fact that the collaborative work on the book about vowels moved Joel into what is called an "island of competence," an area of comparative strength in a person's life in which the person acts from a base of confidence

(LaVoie, qtd. in Myles and Simpson 283). It is illogical to think that any student who gets essay after essay back with red-letter corrections is going to enjoy writing or build up a desire to work harder on it. The vowel book, however, gave Joel a chance to collaborate meaningfully in a language arts task in which he could develop a sense of pride. "Sketching, drawing, or graphing developing ideas gives students who can visualize images an opportunity to use that talent productively," states Patricia Dunn in *Talking, Sketching, Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing* (66). Indeed, his talents in drawing were admired by other students in school later on, so there were positive social outcomes waiting for him in any class that let him showcase his artistic side. In a writing class, a student cannot be left to draw all the time, but an "on occasion" basis is not only fair, it is realistic: in an Internet-controlled world, we more and more need individuals who think visually and who can tie text and illustrations together.

Joel and I visited local museums and children's theaters. When he accompanied me to my university classes, he sat quietly doing workbook pages, reading books, or drawing after he was finished. He never interrupted, and, as the year progressed, he actually began to raise his hand occasionally to answer a question. In the numerous talks we had about how school worked, I explicitly decoded the social situation for him, explaining the needs of the teacher as well as the students to help him develop theory of mind, the ability to see another person's point of view. One day he told me that he wanted to come to college when he was grown up. Asked why, he replied simply that at college no one ever slammed him into the wall, a poignant reminder of what elementary school had been like.

Joel returned to a different public school in our district for fifth grade with a sense that he had talents worth developing. He understood that it was possible to have learning disabilities yet still be gifted. He understood that different people had different roles in the classroom. His difficulties in math and spelling hadn't vanished, but having his needs as a learner met genuinely for a year made him ready to join the learning community in his class. Readiness of this type is an absolute prerequisite for school success.

FIGURE 1. Joel's sketch of Oscar English.

What I Learned from Homeschool

Our year of homeschool taught me several lessons that pertain to writing instruction in middle school, high school, and in my first-year composition classes at the university. A few of these lessons target only students with learning disabilities, but most seem relevant to all students. First, I discovered that freewriting as a preplanning tool for longer essays works only with certain populations. My son, like many learning disabled students, did not belong to this population. "It's good for talking about emotions," he says, but for school it makes him feel "scatterbrained." The conclusion of research on college students supports what he is saying, calling freewriting "devastating" for learning disabled students: "Writing in this unstructured manner might be their weakest point, since it does not provide explicit ideas about what to write. That is, when these students do not know where the writing is heading, the writing exercise might be of little benefit" (Li and Hamel 38). What works better, say the authors, is the planning of writing "through directed conversations or writing conferences" (38). This technique allows students to capitalize on their verbal skills and, therefore, encourages them to figure out how much they already know, facts that often get lost in anxiety as they stare at a blank page. If individual conferences are not feasible because of class size, the directed conversation could take place between student peers if they have a questionnaire to help elicit information.

I also noticed that Joel's performance in writing during our homeschool year changed considerably depending on the topic given. That was not a surprise, given that autistic spectrum students often have to be

engaged via their personal areas of interest. However, when I extrapolated what I learned from his situation to my classes, I found the same to be true for all students. Switching from traditional research papers to the I-Search type of inquiry-based research originally proposed by Ken Macrorie for middle school and high school classrooms dramatically improved students' engagement with and willingness to learn the research process. The inquiry-based philosophy of I-Search papers set exactly the right tone for university life. Of particular importance to students like my son, I-Search papers seem to fit the notion of "whole language philosophy" (Li and Hamel 40), a teaching practice valued at Landmark College, a two-year institution with a student body comprised entirely of students with learning disabilities. Landmark's classes involve offering students "topics that are mostly self-selected, meaningful, and authentic, which motivates [them] to write for their own purposes" (Li and Hamel 40). Tenured professors always work on topics that are self-selected, meaningful, and authentic. Why would we deny this opportunity to young students?

The ability or inability to participate in sustained conversation was another issue that arose during our homeschool year. Joel had an above average vocabulary but was a tangential thinker. He tended to lose the conversational focus, an obvious disadvantage he and children with attention-deficit challenges share. To address this problem, we created a game with colored chips—two colors, in our case, since two people were conversing. The game we played had one rule: whoever was speaking could put a chip in the common bowl only if the ideas spoken fit into the agreed-on topic. At the end, it was easy to see who had stayed focused. Since the game quality lent the exercise a quotient of fun, Joel was willing to practice. As a result, he was a much better conversationalist by the end of the year. In class this game could be practiced for conversation and for writing meant to be shared. After a while, the chips can be discarded and a simple question asked about whether what was just said deserved, say, a blue chip or not.

Such focused conversation is a precursor to academic discussion. In fact, conversation is so important in academic life that I think it should be practiced in writing before students ever arrive at college. Middle school is not too young to start. It is better for a student to arrive in college not sure of citation styles than to arrive not understanding what Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein call the "They Say/I Say" component of academic discourse. By this phrase they mean the fundamental concept that academic writing involves figuring out who are the experts in the topic at hand and learning how to introduce one's own thoughts into the conversation. It also touches on the notion of plagiarism and why avoiding it is important. These skills are fundamental learning tasks of college writers. Students who come to college underprepared in this area, even if they know how to cite resources, can struggle mightily in their composition courses.

Mostly what I learned from a year in homeschool with my son is that it is critical to get to know students as individuals—their likes and dislikes, their learning styles—to create a harmonious relationship with them. The process sounds overwhelming only if a teacher doesn't realize that all students are experts on their own lives. Especially as they get into higher grades, students can—and should—be asked how a lesson plan is working, i.e., does a vertical number line or a horizontal one make more sense to you? Or, would you like to read by yourself or in tandem with another student? How can our class benefit from what you do well? This sense of individual empowerment, of being heard by the teacher, is often the difference between an engaged student and one who is metaphorically turning round and round in the principal's chair as a way of saying, "Notice me."

Tenured professors always work on topics that are self-selected, meaningful, and authentic. Why would we deny this opportunity to young students?

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

For those who find Mind Maps and Graphic Organizers helpful for working with students, ReadWriteThink.org has collected our best printable sheets, from assessments to organizers—all of them classroom-tested and easy to use. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/printouts/

2011 NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing

Submission information and entry forms are now available for NCTE's 2011 Achievement Awards in Writing program for current 11th-grade students. You may download the information from the Web at http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/aa or request a brochure by mail by sending an email with your school name and address to aa@ncte.org.

Achievement Awards in Writing is a school-based writing program established in 1957 to encourage high school students in their writing and to recognize publicly some of the best student writers in the nation. The National Council of Teachers of English will give achievement awards in writing to nominated students who are cited as excellent writers by judges.

The entry deadline for this year's awards is **February 15, 2011.**

Elizabeth Park Reid

The Outcast Comes In: Grappling with Physical Disability in the Literacy Classroom

A young woman finds her voice in writing and a community in sports.

The road from middle school to high school was a rough one for my daughter. Seventh grade was the worst: sixth graders from the district's four elementary schools merged for the first time in one huge seventh-grade class. Friendships were ruptured or discovered. Since it was now middle school, students met with six or seven different teachers every day. Classes changed every 42 minutes, and the hallways burst with jostling adolescents trying to expend some of the energy they'd controlled in class. In that torrent of change, Abby found that literacy classes, in which she'd always done well, where her work had always filled her with pride, were no longer a site where she could find validation. By the time she started high school, her middle school in general, and language arts classes in particular, had convinced her she was an incompetent writer and, even worse, an unacceptable human being. Reading and writing assignments had created emotional disasters for her.

She arrived in high school prepared to continue the downward slide. However, a poetry assignment in her ninth-grade ELA class marked the beginning of a shift. When she wrote a poem about the birth of an AIDS baby, her teacher saw her potential as a writer, nourished it, and championed her ability. Her tenth-grade language arts teacher led her on an upward trajectory through myriad positive classroom experiences, including leadership roles in group activities and frequent pointing to passages in Abby's work as excellent examples. Success that year was capped when she became a published writer. This surge continued through the rest of high school, undergraduate school, and into graduate studies. Her master's program advisor wrote on one of Abby's essays, "I am gobsmacked . . . by the beauty, power, expressiveness and focus of this essay." Later on, commenting on Abby's master's thesis, the same advisor particularly noted the high quality of Abby's writing. Getting there was not easy.

Education and Identity

In seventh grade, in the mid-1990s, Abby found no accurate representation of herself in literature, no room for her voice in writing. The ELA curriculum at her middle school proved a minefield for a young woman of color who wore a leg brace and walked with crutches. Her teachers were all well intentioned, but the pervasive public sensitivity of the period had some gaping holes. A Newbery Award–winning novel, a summer reading assignment, started Abby's nightmare. Ellen Raskin's *The Westing Game* featured Chris, a wheelchair user, among other characters. Chris sat at a window all day, and in a plot that owed a lot to the classic Alfred Hitchcock film *Rear Window,* Chris helped solve a mystery because of clues he observed from his vantage point.

How wonderful, I thought when I read the book in preparation for discussing it with her, *here's a fictional hero who grapples with many of the same challenges Abby faces.* I initially thought this was a book Abby could read as a way to celebrate her identity as a person with a disability. Seeing yourself mirrored positively in popular culture boosts your self-confidence; any seventh grader can benefit from that, but one with a disability needs it more than most.

In fact, the story built Chris into a hero, but sadly, a postscript and a near toss-away comment undid the potential good influence this book might have had on Abby. Turtle (the main character) is an adult who is married to Chris's brother, Theo. The troubling line was, "Turtle and Theo had decided against having children because of the possibility of inheriting Chris's disease" (181). This was a devastating message for my daughter.

Abby and I talked about her reaction, that however much Turtle and her friends had welcomed Chris's help and company when they were younger, as adults, they felt he should never have been born. Chris goes on to marry, to become a professor of ornithology, to travel widely, and to discover a new subspecies of parrot that is named after him—all in sharp contrast to how his brother and sister-in-law saw him, at least in Abby's interpretation. There isn't a right or wrong in the way readers interpret the intentions of fictional characters, but someone more mature than a sensitive seventh grader, someone who wasn't caught up in the throes of adolescence, might have constructed a less-personal and less-painful interpretation than did my daughter.

D. Soyini Madison writes movingly of the way a black feminist spectator gazes at a text (in this case film) and sits "before the screen, all the while reading what she watches through a consciousness of the profound confluence of what it means to be underclass, to be woman, and to be black" (224). For Abby, also a woman of color, that gaze is focused not only through perspectives of race and gender but also through a finely ground lens of ability.

And as if one pitfall wasn't enough, one of the first writing assignments she had that year was to write an autobiography. This genre can be a powerful tool in developing and nurturing a writer's voice, as is demonstrated in Kelly Wissman's *English Journal* article about a poetry class for urban high school students. However, autobiographies assigned in middle school can also threaten an adolescent's belief in her ability to fit into her peer group. Desperate not to out herself as being adopted as well as disabled, Abby begged me for help. I realized that she was battling with an adolescent's need to fit into her peer group to the greatest extent possible. Together we concocted a story that I felt served the purpose both for her and for her teacher. It was returned with a grade of C and the brusque and unhelpful comment, "Needs more detail." This was the first grade lower than A- that she had ever received on a writing assignment, and it nearly did her in.

Abby had resisted the autobiography assignment in a way that must have puzzled the teacher. Abby, presenting herself as what Sue Turnbull calls "a trope of covert resistance" (89) in the autobiography assignment, gained little from resisting, but she still managed to avoid disclosing yet another factor that would mark her as different from her peers. Not knowing if the autobiographies would be made public, and too shy to ask, she constructed new threats to the possibility of fitting in and did her best to dodge them.

Abby's grades started falling, and she finished eighth grade a very unhappy kid. Some years later when she was in graduate school, she wrote that middle school was

> a period in my life when I felt as though life as I knew it should cease to exist right then and there. I was tired of the rejection. I was tired of being cast out by my peers for the fact that I was different. I was disabled . . . I tried so hard to fit in with the girls that continued to deny me as being human. They spoke directly to me when they said things that I would have preferred been said while I was not present. I spent many nights crying, questioning my being. I could only bear so much verbal abuse. I so strongly believed that if I did not belong with those girls who continued to reject [me] then I clearly did not belong anywhere. (Park 3)

I spoke with the principal about both assignments, and in connection with the book I also talked with the assistant superintendent. Not yet having left my corporate career to become a teacher, I came into the discussions as an outsider. The administrators I spoke with were understanding, concerned, and followed up on my questions. In the case of the writing assignment, although the teacher was agreeable to my concerns, he continued to assign autobiographies because the task was tightly woven into the school curriculum. My concerns about the book were countered with the fact that it had won a Newbery Award. This was seen as proof that I was wrong.

When I began teaching, I learned that there were better ways to approach issues such as the ones

with which I had struggled over *The Westing Game* and the autobiography assignment. Years later, one of the teachers I spoke with about my daughter had become my colleague, and he raised *The Westing Game* issue again, saying that he still believed he had been right. I didn't pursue it with him. I assume he believed that once I'd joined the teaching ranks, surely I would believe (1) that parents shouldn't advocate for their children in opposition to a teacher and (2) that with the Newbery Award behind him, he was infallible. What I missed was that many teachers are simply not prepared to understand the emotional needs of a young person who has a normal (or higher) cognitive function combined with a body that doesn't work, or look, like those of the other students in class. Marilyn Rousso begins her essay on adolescent women with disabilities with this quotation from an activist in disability rights: "Behind every successful disabled woman is a pushy mother." In hindsight, I wish I could have channeled my pushiness into a collaboration that supported both my daughter *and* her middle school teachers. When I began teaching and had my own classes, I avoided asking students to write autobiographies. I did, however, assign memoirs, and a favorite for my students and me was to describe a preferred food and a special event at which they had eaten the dish, or another memory they cherished that in some way involved the food. That assignment allowed students to explore their identities without baring their souls.

Supporting Students with Disabilities

How to plan instruction in ways that will support students whose physical abilities make them different from their peers is not a question easily answered. I was able to find only one book that addressed both physical disabilities and schooling: Hayley Fitzgerald's well-developed study of British sports and physical education for students with disabilities, which includes references to wheelchair sports. Abby found a comfortable, welcoming space in this arena. In "Outcast," her essay for *The Apprentice Writer,* she wrote of practice sessions and meets for wheelchair athletes:

> At these events everyone has a disability, whether it's osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bone disease) spina bifida (a hole formed in the spine during its development) or spinal cord injury. Wheelchair sports do not only provide me and other athletes with various disabilities something to do in our spare time, but also provide each of us with a great personal experience and the satisfaction of knowing that even though we are physically challenged we are still able to achieve the impossible. Together we experience competitions, food fights, and dances—just like anyone else. At these events, no one is considered an outcast. (51)

With wheelchair competitions, Abby found not only a comfortable social niche but also an opportunity to become an athletic star. During her first few years of competing, she racked up every national track record for her age and ability classification. As a high school student, she competed internationally in Australia and Canada.

Abby's wheelchair coach, Andy Chasanoff, often said that these athletic competitions were among the few places where people looked at young people with disabilities in terms of what they *could* do instead of what they *couldn't* do. This perspective worked on the playing field, and it was this perspective that informed the way Abby's ninth- and tenth-grade teachers saw and attended to her literacy skills and practices. They saw her first as a young woman with a strong and particular voice, and they made their classrooms fertile ground for her literacy growth by asking for, and honoring, her contributions to classroom discussions, as well as tactfully positioning her among her classmates as a powerful writer.

A favorite for my students and me was to describe a preferred food and a special event at which they had eaten the dish, or another memory they cherished that in some way involved the food. That assignment allowed students to explore their identities without baring their souls.

If you asked these teachers what they did differently for Abby than others had done, they probably wouldn't be able to answer. As her mother, though, I can. They were observant, and they knew which students Abby chatted with. They grouped her with them frequently, but not always. They chose Abby's work to read aloud as an example, but not more often than they asked other capable students. When there were leadership roles to be taken

up, they assigned them to Abby—neither more nor less often than they assigned them to other students. In other words, they included her but did not single her out. When they conferenced privately with her, they deferred to her special knowledge of disability and of wheelchair sports, making her feel proud of her expertise. They asked her specific questions about the equipment, the standards, the processes, and compared them to their own experiences of able-bodied sports. They didn't ask her to take that expert stance in public unless she sought it. Even so, they spent far more time with her discussing her writing or her responses to text in ways that had nothing to do with disability. One of those teachers went to bat for Abby and successfully convinced the school administration to place her in the accelerated honors program. He never told her, but I did. I wanted her to know how deeply he believed in her. They were, like her wheelchair sports coach, looking at Abby in terms of what she could do: write meaningful text, follow accepted conventions for specific genres, engage others in narrative explorations she created, make meaning from text, analyze both the meaning and her responses, and engage deeply in the narrative explorations of others.

Creating Positive Learning Environments for All Students

How can other teachers create similar environments? The dearth of literature about working with physically disabled students in mainstream settings seems to be matched by what is (not) to be found in teacher training programs. I've been associated as a graduate student or adjunct instructor with five teacher training programs, and none has addressed the needs of physically disabled students in a way that would offer preservice teachers a substantive understanding of the affective issues they might face in the mainstream language arts classroom. Considering that 67% of the nation's public schools have students with physical disabilities on their rolls ("Special Hardware and Software"), teachers would be better served with some meaningful guidance in this area.

They included her but did not single her out. When they conferenced privately with her, they deferred to her special knowledge of disability and of wheelchair sports, making her feel proud of her expertise.

Whether this is to be accomplished through courses specifically focusing on physical ability and disability, or whether it could be realized through efforts to help preservice teachers develop the ability to understand and value the strengths of all students, regardless of gender, race, ability, or social class, I can't say. As a parent, a teacher, and a doctoral student, I simply know that it should happen. I also know that if it doesn't, we will not reap the benefits that our society can enjoy when all of our citizens can contribute to the common good to the best of their potential.

What Abby's experience tells us is that those of us who teach our students to read and write to grow as human beings can help our students effect startling changes. Those changes can be for better or worse, and while Abby experienced both, she was fortunate in the teachers who helped her find her voice, speak for herself, and command respect through her writing.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Assessing Cultural Relevance: Exploring Personal Connections to a Text" helps students to find themselves. As a class, students evaluate a nonfiction or realistic fiction text for its cultural relevance to themselves personally and as a group. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/assessing-cultural-relevance-exploring-1003.html

Teaching Poetry in Georgia Schools

My house is like a pond, she says. *Is so pretty.*
I ask her to say it again.
Can you say that again?
Did you say "pond"?

Round body of water behind a house in Vermont
where a white girl skinny dips and geese
make merry with picnics:
How can a house be like a pond?

She tells me Grandmom bakes custard pies.
She has a green carpet in the kitchen.
Her daddy likes candy. There's a waterfall by the door.

I ask her to say it again.
Can you say that again?
Did you say "waterfall by the door"?

I don't know if there is water by her house,
a splashing image in a cheap frame from the flea market,
or the sound of a neighbor's pipes
flushing through the wall.

She writes about rainbows and spells rain *rian* and *bow*
as a separate word and *door* with two r's and one o
and she sits next to a boy who writes that he is from *Mixeco.*

Her skin is the color of pine bark; eyes framed in small
gold globes like two ponds filled with a life made visible
through close looking. I know how to live in this school trailer,
but I'm from a house like a jewel box.

She asks me to say it again.
Can you say it again?
Did you say "jewel box"? Tha's nice.

—Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor

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Mentoring Matters

Mentoring as Collaborative Effort

When I have had opportunities to work with mentor programs in schools, I have recommended a global prescription for mentors to help new teachers make the transition into the world of teaching: encourage them to follow the practices that are most like those of good, experienced teachers. Experienced teachers are different from new teachers; the veterans have many advantages that come with experience. But how can new teachers gain some of the advantages of experience without actually experiencing years of teaching? This column summarizes some of the distinctive advantages that come with experience and suggests how collaborative approaches to teaching promote some of those advantages.

Learning from Experienced Teachers

Some new teachers leave their teacher preparation programs with a solid theoretical base to guide their practice. While new teachers can operate from a theoretical basis to say generally how they can plan instruction, experienced teachers can envision their plans in great detail. Experienced teachers can search memory and evaluate several *choices* that they have available to them to contend with planning or problem solving. Veteran teachers benefit from recalling several possibilities from past experience in the classroom. Whether the situation involves a curriculum decision or other professional problem solving, experienced teachers can usually select an appropriate choice to fit the current situation. Experienced teachers often operate from a strong theoretical base to judge which possibilities are appropriate and which are best. But experienced teachers have more than theory, because they draw from episodes from teaching experience to validate the direction that they are inclined to follow. Not only do the experienced teachers have options from which to choose for current action, they have several contingencies from which to draw in case the initial choice does not seem possible.

In part, the choices available to experienced teachers come from an ability to *anticipate* possible outcomes and complications. They know what is likely to happen if they initiate a particular assignment or activity, introduce a particular text, or propose specific writing. In essence, the seasoned practitioner reflects on the same or analogous situations from the past to predict how students are likely to respond. This capacity to anticipate outcomes allows the teacher to decide whether to go forward with plans or to alter them in some way. In addition, anticipating events allows the teacher to imagine contingencies in the event that lessons advance in any of several directions.

New teachers find it helpful to know the underlying principles that drive the curriculum. While it is helpful to have access to curriculum guides and classroom materials, teachers also need to know why other teachers have determined that students should pursue particular goals, read particular texts, and engage in particular activities. An understanding of the guiding principles for the courses they teach allows teachers to make decisions that provide for variations and creativity while remaining true to the central principles for the instruction. Having a clear *vision* of what one should teach and how to teach it is a powerful benefit for day-to-day operation in the classroom. Typically, after years of practice and reflection, a strong experienced teacher will have a solid vision of what the enterprise of teaching English is about, including a detailed image of what the teacher's role is, and

what the classroom dynamic should look like.

Experienced teachers have a further advantage of knowing much about the students, the community, the culture of the school and department, and the resources within the school. Without an *awareness* of features of the school organization, of common practices among colleagues, and of traditions in the school or profession, the new teachers' choices for action are limited. In planning instruction and in contending with any of a number of problem-solving situations, teachers have options when they are aware of resources, constraints, and possibilities. It is not uncommon for a new teacher to observe how an experienced teacher has addressed a problem or planned some element in a unit of instruction and to note, "I didn't know that I could do that." The situations might include planning for assessment, replying to an angry parent, preparing for a classroom observation, or requesting to attend a professional conference.

The several advantages that come from experience—*choices, anticipation, vision,* and *awareness*—all contribute to the development of *confidence.* Beginning teachers reveal that without confidence, they are often inhibited by the doubts they have about making decisions and about taking the actions that they feel intuitively inclined to take. Some people give the impression that they are innately confident, but confidence grows from having a solid sense of mission, from anticipating outcomes, from having choices, and from being aware of resources and options.

The Power of Collaboration

With schools required to follow a Response to Intervention protocol and with many schools invested in the idea of a Professional Learning Community, collaboration among colleagues would seem to be common practice in schools. Beyond the collegial discussions of assessment data and team planning for interventions for individual students, many other collaborative efforts can accelerate the development of a beginning teacher. Collaboration provides new teachers with many of the advantages that experienced teachers have.

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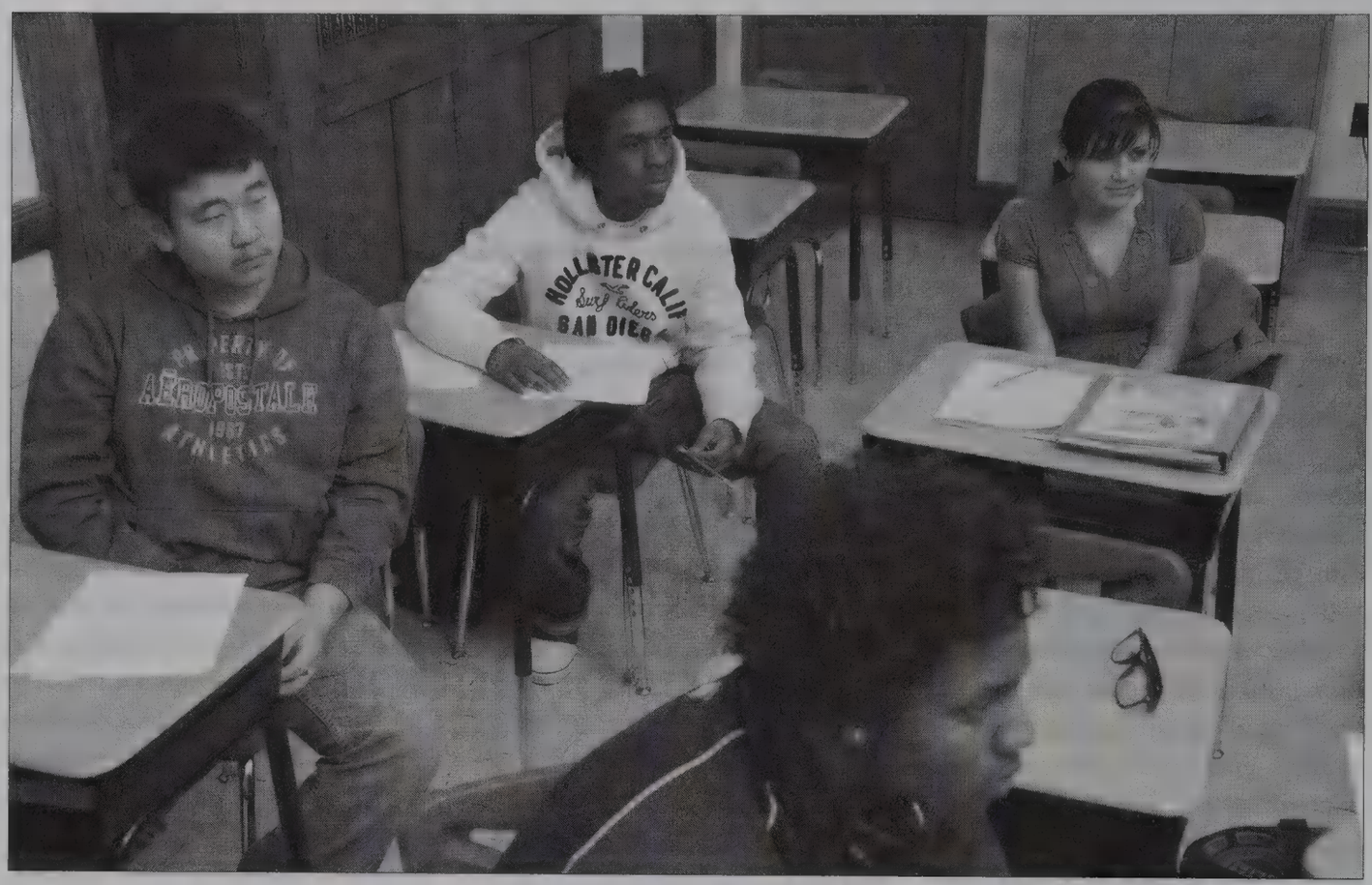
After several years of observing teams of teachers who work in highly functional collaborative groups in middle schools and high schools, and other teachers who work in a more independent and isolated fashion, I can note several contrasts. Collaborative teams tend to plan strategically, keeping specific target outcomes in mind and planning together a course of instruction that offers the strongest potential for students to attain goals. While teachers who plan in relative isolation work conscientiously, they are less inclined to express in detail the kind of learning they want to result from their instruction. In the planning and debriefing sessions, I have witnessed collaborative teams generating and assessing multiple options for lesson activities. With each team member bringing a different experience and a different wealth of knowledge to the task, collaborative teams drew from multiple resources for planning. This would be impossible, or at least limited, with the beginning teachers who work in a more isolated mode. When teams of teachers have met to debrief about the effects of instruction, they have used their insights about current instruction to advance the team planning. I have witnessed collaborative teams posing essential questions of each other: "How will we know if the activities helped the students to understand what they read?" "How do we know the extent to which the class discussions prepared the students for writing analyses of their reading?" The questions prompted the discussion of an assessment plan that would allow the team to answer their questions. Essentially, then, the collaborative team conducted action research. I have witnessed little evidence of such attempts among teachers who operate in a more isolated way.



Thompson-McClellan Photography

Picture a team of teachers planning a unit of instruction together. They talk about their expectations for students' learning, including the quality of the students' experience in the classroom. As they plan the learning activities, they explore and evaluate several possibilities, with each participant offering suggestions. The suggestions draw from each participant's store of knowledge and take advantage of that teacher's strengths and interests. As they weigh the merits of the various options, they identify the resources they need to tap. They provide for the assessment of learning: in the near term, judging if students are learning concepts and procedures as predicted; in the long term, measuring growth over time.

Mentoring as a Team Effort

In the end, when new teachers join with capable, experienced colleagues in the planning and assessing of instruction, they function more like the veteran colleagues that they admire. A seemingly simple avenue to mentoring beginning teachers is to guide them to join regularly with a collaborative team. This recommendation presumes that such collaborative teams already exist in schools. If they do not, the first step is to invite colleagues to participate in group planning, problem solving, and assessing. Such teams do not emerge by chance, and they do not continue to work productively without attention. A mentor must assume leadership and facilitate discussions to encourage contributions, to affirm commitments, and to attend to follow-up obligations. In such a collaborative environment, mentoring means more than one-on-one guidance between veteran and beginner; instead, mentoring is a group effort, involving practitioners with a variety of experience and providing an influential model for how colleagues work together as a matter of course.

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Mark Letcher, Editor

Off the Shelves

Autism in Young Adult Literature

Public schools and their teachers face a plethora of challenges, but perhaps none as great or growing as the number of children diagnosed with autism, or more specifically, an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ASDs can manifest themselves in a number of areas, including social interaction, communication, sensory input, and behavior; ASDs range from relatively mild (such as Asperger's syndrome) to severe (such as autistic disorder, or "classic" autism). According to estimates from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of nearly 1 in 110 American children are affected by autism, which is much higher than experts previously believed; diagnosis is approximately four times more common in boys than in girls (Rice). As broader definitions of ASDs and better detection have contributed, at least in part, to the large increase in diagnoses, we are seeing larger numbers of students living with ASDs in our classrooms as well as in the literature they read.

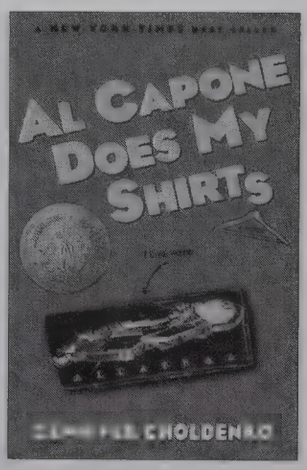
Sleuths with ASDs

Many readers began to see mainstream literary treatment of characters with ASDs in 2003 with the publication of Mark Haddon's crossover bestseller, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Doubleday, 2003). While some may not consider the book part of the YA genre, there can be little doubt that its 15-year-old protagonist, Christopher Boone, spoke to a number of adolescent readers as well as their parents and teachers. While Boone never self-identifies as a young man with an ASD, he does admit that he has some behavioral difficulties. His literal-minded observations lend themselves well to the investigative methodology of his favorite fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, when he begins to investigate the savage stabbing of a neighbor's dog. Siobhan Dowd's excellent page-turner, *The London Eye Mystery* (David Fickling, 2008), picks up the thread of young detective Ted, whose unnamed condition manifests in autistic traits, among them a literal view of the world and the inability to read emotions in others. Ted's unique investigative and deductive abilities come in handy when teamed with his older sister, Kat, to solve the disappearance of their cousin at the London Eye tourist attraction. Dowd's book, like Haddon's, is not only a fascinating look inside the mind of a young person living with a developmental disability but also a taut mystery.

ASDs' Effects on Family Life

There are several outstanding titles that examine the way ASDs affect the family structure through the eyes of a sibling. In Cynthia Lord's *Rules* (Scholastic, 2006), Catherine narrates her life at home with her autistic younger brother, David. Catherine is frustrated by the attention that David necessarily receives from their parents, and she feels neglected. Being the older sibling, she also feels protective toward David and wants to keep their lives as normal as possible. To this end, she develops a list of behavioral rules for David to follow. Catherine's attempts at normalcy are challenged further when she meets Jason, a paraplegic who communicates through the use of word cards. As she comes to understand Jason more, Catherine begins to see that "normalcy" is difficult, if not impossible, to define, and that her rules for David may be getting in the way of simply accepting and loving him for who he is. This is a wonderful look at family dynamics in general, but particularly when a family is faced with ASDs.

Gennifer Choldenko's *Al Capone Does My Shirts* (Putnam, 2004),



and its follow-up, *Al Capone Shines My Shoes* (Dial, 2009), focus primarily on twelve-year-old Moose Flanagan who lives on Alcatraz Island circa 1935. Moose's father is a guard at the infamous prison, which counts Capone as a "guest." Both novels offer fascinating historical perspectives on the time period and Alcatraz itself, which was a fully functional federal prison until 1963. The books are also strong portraits of a young boy grappling with friendships, family, and the responsibilities that come with age. The intrigue that surrounds the setting, and the involvement of Al Capone himself in Moose's life, makes the books even more engaging.

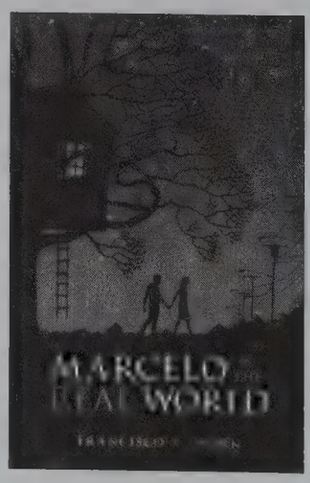
Most germane to this review, however, is Choldenko's sensitive portrayal of Moose's older sister, Natalie. In 2010, we would view Natalie as exhibiting many autistic behaviors, but in 1935, autism was not a diagnosis available to physicians. One of Moose's friends describes Natalie as living "in her own world. . . . Sometimes it's a good world and sometimes it's a bad world. And sometimes she can get out and sometimes she can't." Stripped of clinical terminology, this simple depiction remains, for me, one of the more lasting descriptions of what it means to be autistic. In *Al Capone Does My Shirts,* the Flanagans struggle to deal with Natalie's behavior and dream of sending her to the prestigious Esther P. Marinoff School, which promises to help teach Natalie how to function more ably in the world. When Natalie's acceptance into the school is thrown into jeopardy, Moose reaches out to Alcatraz's most famous inmate and is indebted when Capone engineers a spot at the school for his sister. *Al Capone Shines My Shoes* finds Natalie at the Marinoff School and Moose realizing that Capone now wants Moose to do him a favor in return. Both books feature great humor and strong dialogue and are highly recommended for tween readers.

Taking a view of autism from the parents' perspective, Keiko Tobe's *With the Light* manga series (Yen Press) is a multi-part, detailed, and moving account of a young couple who must cope with the realization that their infant son has autism. Much of the plot revolves around the mother, Sachiko, and her efforts not only to understand autism itself but also to find ways to help Hikaru and dispel some of the myths and misconceptions that surround autism. Despite its emphasis on parental roles and responsibilities, this series' entrancing and gorgeous manga artwork makes the book appeal to young readers. This series has been highly acclaimed in Japan and abroad and has been released in six volumes in the United States, following Hikaru up until his junior high years. Tobe treats her characters with dignity, and her vivid illustrations and dialogue show readers how autism is represented and perceived in another culture. Sadly, Tobe passed away in January 2010, so Hikaru's story will remain unfinished.

First-Person Perspectives on ASD

I've recently read three marvelous YA novels, all published since 2009, that have made me stop to catch my breath while reading. These novels have excelled at depicting young people with ASDs from first-person perspectives and provide tears, laughter, and a greater understanding of how others live in their worlds.

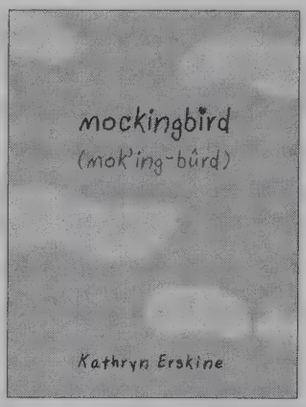
Francisco Stork's *Marcelo in the Real World* (Levine, 2009) presents readers with Marcelo Sandoval, a high-functioning, extremely self-aware 17-year-old with an Asperger's-like condition. Marcelo has been attending Paterson, a special needs school, since the first grade. As he enters the summer before his senior year, Marcelo's father—a high-powered attorney—offers him a proposition: Marcelo will work the summer at his father's law firm, and afterwards, he can decide whether to return to Paterson or attend the



local public high school for his senior year. As Marcelo's father states, though, "You must follow all the rules of the . . . real world." This frightens Marcelo, yet he accepts the offer and joins the law firm in the mailroom. During his time at the firm, he learns to better read people's emotions, think on his feet, and deal with people who do not always have his best interests at heart. When he discovers a photograph that demonstrates negligence by one of the law firm's most important clients, Marcelo decides that he must right the wrong, even if doing so would damage the firm—and his relationship with his father. Stork's craft is evident in the way he represents Marcelo's consciousness and how he develops his skill set gradually over the course of the summer.

Jason Blake, the narrator of Nora Raleigh Baskin's *Anything But Typical* (Simon, 2009), is younger than Marcelo, but the two characters are similar in their ability to identify how their conditions affect them and their relationships with others. Jason was diagnosed with an ASD in second grade, and now in sixth grade, he continues to face challenges, although he is fully included in all classroom activities. Jason's only "quiet" time is when he's on his computer, posting his creative writing to Storyboard, an online fan fiction site. Through Storyboard, he begins to communicate with another young writer, whose screen name is PhoenixBird. PhoenixBird enthusiastically responds to Jason's stories, and Jason begins an online friendship with her, to the point where he considers her a girlfriend. When Jason's parents surprise him with a trip to the Storyboard convention, where he can meet PhoenixBird in person, Jason is terrified of what she will think when she realizes that his online persona does not match the person. The tremendous voice that Baskin creates for Jason allows readers to see that people with ASDs do indeed feel emotions, but those emotions are expressed in different ways from "neuro-typical" standards. In particular, the relationship that is established between Jason and his parents will at turns break and warm readers' hearts, as Baskin shows how parents can misread situations as much as someone with an ASD can. I cannot recommend this book strongly enough for middle school teachers and readers.

Another middle-grade-appropriate title, Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird* (Philomel, 2010), complicates the picture of ASDs with the pain of losing a family member. Ten-year-old Caitlin is a talented artist living with Asperger's. Her mother has died of cancer several years before, and as the novel opens, we learn that her older brother Devon, her confidante and protector, has been killed in a school shooting. Caitlin's father is devastated and has trouble dealing with Caitlin's reactions to Devon's absence. Caitlin's school counselor tells Caitlin that she will need to find closure, a concept that Caitlin initially cannot wrap her mind around. When she meets a younger boy at school whose mother was also killed in the shooting, Caitlin begins to establish a true friendship and work closer toward the elusive closure that everyone wants her to find. This is a brilliant and moving novel not only about living with Asperger's but also about losing a loved one and building relationships with those who are left behind.



Award-Winning Titles

Books such as these tackle an enormously difficult and complicated subject with thoughtfulness and clarity. Characters are never treated as abnormal, and in some cases the authors have written based on their own experience with ASDs. I believe these titles present excellent opportunities for teachers to broach the subject of ASDs with honesty and depth. Teachers who wish to explore more titles that examine characters like Marcelo, Jason, and Caitlin, as well as other young people with disabilities, should check the American Library Association's Schneider Family

Book Awards, given annually to titles that embody "an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences." Both Stork's and Baskin's novels were deservedly honored with the 2009 Schneider awards for Best Teen Book and Best Middle Grade Book, respectively. I expect *Mockingbird* to be mentioned on that list when the 2010 awards are given. Whenever books can open eyes to different situations and challenges facing students, those books should find their way into the hands of readers.

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Call for Proposals: NCTE Theory and Research into Practice (TRIP) Book Series

The NCTE Books Program invites proposals for its TRIP series (Theory and Research into Practice). These books are single-authored and focus on a single topic, targeting a specified educational level (elementary, middle, or secondary). Each book will offer the following: solid theoretical foundation in a given subject area within English language arts; exposure to the pertinent research in that area; practice-oriented models designed to stimulate theory-based application in the reader's own classroom. The series has an extremely wide range of subject matter; past titles include *Genre Theory, Unlocking Shakespeare's Language, Code-Switching,* and *Writing about Literature.* For detailed submission guidelines, please visit the NCTE website at http://www.ncte.org/write/books. Proposals to be considered for the TRIP series should include a short review of the theory and research, as well as examples of classroom practices that can be adapted to the teaching level specified. Proposals should be submitted through NCTE's Web-based manuscript submission and review system, Editorial Manager, at http://www.editorialmanager.com/nctebp/.

Jonathan Bush and Leah Zuidema, Editors

Professional Writing in the English Classroom

Professional Writing: What You Already Know

We are pleased to present the first installment of "Professional Writing in the English Classroom." We should begin by answering the obvious question: What is professional writing? It isn't remedial writing, and it involves much more than writing memos, business letters, and résumés (although it certainly includes those genres). Professional writing has many names—*technical communication, technical writing, business communication,* and others. Here, we use the term *professional writing* because it provides the most flexible definition of the concept: writing within professional contexts.

Some professional writing is done by full-time writers such as technical communicators, public relations specialists, journalists, and advertisers. But professional writing also encompasses the writing that occurs within other professions—the writing of teachers, lawyers, doctors, store managers, academics, salespeople, accountants, researchers, civil servants, and others—anyone in any profession who writes as a way to get work done. Professional writing includes complex genres such as proposals, multimedia presentations, and formal reports, but it also includes short documents such as notes to coworkers, directives, or email. When professional writing is done well, it takes into account the writer's purposes, the needs and expectations of the audience, the conventions of genre, and the complexities of situation and context.

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Choices, Not Formulas

To explore this concept further, let's examine a genre familiar to most of us: the "sub plan." Like many teachers, we remember our early years in the classroom and how difficult it was to write good plans for substitute teachers. We received some advice from peers and guidance from administrators, but we learned quickly that the best way to know if our writing was successful was to read the notes left by the substitutes and compare them to the (sometimes overheard) comments of students and neighboring teachers. Experience taught us that good sub plans tend to include things such as

- Detailed lesson plans,
- Descriptions of classroom routines and policies,
- Class copies of handouts and worksheets,
- Seating charts, and
- "What to do if" lists with some possible classroom issues and responses.

But a sub plan is much more than a generic list of traits. It is also a representation of what we want to accomplish in our teaching, a depiction of our expectations for students, and an interpretation of our school culture. Furthermore, a sub plan reflects our concept of our audiences—our primary audience (the substitute teacher), along with tertiary audiences (our students, teaching colleagues, support staff, administrators, and others who might come in contact with the sub plan—or the results from it). Much as there are many ways to write a résumé, a memo, an editorial, or any other form of professional communication, there are also multiple ways to compose a sub plan. We can pay attention to form without being formulaic. Consider the two different examples here: one that takes the traditional form of a

FIGURE 1. Letter to a Substitute Teacher

November 17, 2010

Dear Substitute Teacher,

Thank you for taking my classes while I am at the NCTE Annual Convention. I really appreciate it! I explain my lesson plans below, and I have also attached a bell schedule and information about classroom rules, lunch, and what to do if there are problems with students or with the technology. Please take attendance for each class—seating charts are in the folder.

For English 9 (blocks 3 and 5 Thursday; block 8 Friday), we have been reading *Romeo and Juliet,* and students are working in small groups to collect or create the props necessary for our in-class performance of the play. For homework, students were to reread their assigned scene(s) and list the essential props, along with the line numbers from the play that state or imply that specific props are needed.

In class today, students should work in their assigned groups (see the attached list) to compare their notes and type one group chart. (One laptop per group from the cart.) There is an example chart on the board; please explain to students the three columns: (1) the <u>props</u> and whether they are essential or optional; (2) the corresponding <u>quotes with line numbers</u> from the play that state or imply the props are needed; and (3) <u>notes</u> about what group members need to do to bring the props to school by Wednesday, November 24. These notes should specify who will take the prop, or whom they will ask for permission to borrow it, or what materials they will need in order to make it.

- When groups finish making this chart, they need to print a copy for each group member and one to hand in. Please collect my copy from the groups.
- Those who finish early should start typing a form letter that they will use to request permission to borrow specific props. They will be able to finish this in class when I return.

letter (see fig. 1) and an alternative akin to what Leah has used in her classroom (see fig. 2).

Even though the content of the sub plan in Figure 1 is unique, the letter format is probably familiar. The date is in the conventional place; the greeting is standard for a letter; the opening note of thanks and the mention of classroom rules, attendance, and the like are conventional. Furthermore, the organization of ideas is also conventional. Information about what to teach is grouped by the different classes that the teacher is responsible for, and within the notes for each class, the reader can find details, listed chronologically, about what the teacher and students should do during the period and about what students are assigned for homework. This is a rather typical example, definitely within the general purposes and constraints of the sub plan genre.

However, in professional writing, there isn't just one right way to write in a given situation. Writers make choices about which genres to use and how best to shape them. We consider our role in relation to the audience, context, and purpose, and then we decide the best way to approach the situation. For example, Figure 2 is a different version of the same sub plan—a take on the same situation, but with different ideas about audience, purpose, and context—and, ultimately, about the form and function of the genre. When Leah used this type of sub plan, she wrote a short note to the substitute teacher, who was asked to distribute photocopies of the memo to students and ensure that they followed the instructions.

The letter and the memo both work to accomplish a well-structured and productive classroom in the teacher's absence. Note, however, that the writing is focused toward different audiences. In the memo, rather than directly addressing the teacher, Leah makes a direct rhetorical appeal to her students. In doing so, she approaches the same issue in different ways within the body of the text, using her professional writing knowledge as a teacher to guide her.

Were both examples effective? We would only know by assessing the real-world result: if the substitute teacher felt well-prepared and left the day with a good impression of the students and the class, if the students felt the day was productive, and if the teacher believed that the day's goals were accomplished. The key point is that both examples reflect the teacher's professional knowledge—a teacher's understanding of audience, purpose, situation, and a specific genre.

Learning to Make Choices in Context

The types of professional writing we teachers do are as varied as our classrooms, schools, and communities. For our students, we write syllabi, classroom rules, assignment instructions, responses to papers, Web pages, and report card comments. For audiences beyond our classrooms, we write newsletters, permission slips, dis-

FIGURE 2. Memo to Students

To: English 9 students
From: Ms. Zuidema
CC: Substitute teacher
Date: November 17
Re: Agenda and homework

Below is your to-do list for the November 18/19 class period. Please follow it, and if you have questions, check with the substitute teacher. Work hard, and enjoy!

1. Gather the following materials and meet your group at your usual spot in the classroom:
   - your copy of *Romeo and Juliet,*
   - the list of props and line numbers you completed for today's homework, and
   - if you are the group secretary today, a laptop from the cart.
2. As a group, study the example chart on the board so that you will know how to make a similar chart. Notice as you read each row from left to right:
   - Column 1 lists the **prop needed** and whether it is **essential or optional;**
   - Column 2 contains the **quotation with line numbers** from the play that states or implies that the prop is needed;
   - Column 3 specifies what **action** your group will need to take to have the prop to school by Wednesday, November 24. Tell either **who will take** the prop, or **whom you will ask** for permission to borrow it, or **what materials** your group will need in order to make it.
3. Create one chart as a group; your secretary will type it on the laptop and print copies for all group members, plus one for me. Follow the example on the board, and use the lists you wrote as homework for today to help you decide together what to include.

[And so on . . .]

ciplinary notices, emails, conference papers, grant proposals, letters of recommendation, workshop materials, professional articles, PowerPoint presentations, and peer evaluations. Whatever we write, we make choices within an authentic context.

We don't go to work in the morning intent on writing emails and assignment instructions "just because," as if our jobs were about composing a set number of documents in a set number of genres each day. Rather, we see problems to solve and opportunities for progress, and we use writing to accomplish this work. Our professional writing requires us to write from what we know—to work from an understanding of teaching, of composing, and of the professional context. Therefore, it makes sense that many of us as teachers learn professional writing not only through the advice we receive but also through models, experience, and practice.

There are important parallels here to how our students can best learn professional writing. Students may not be ready to learn the writing that is particular to a specific profession, but they can learn about types of writing that are commonly used across a range of professions. However, students are no more interested than we are in a checklist of "Genres I Will Write Today, Just Because." Students rightly question the relevance of rote exercises that require them to follow forms and formulas without thinking about who they are writing to, or why, or in what capacity. Like us, student writers need to learn to make contextualized choices, to pay attention to rhetorical GAPS (Genre, Audience, Purpose, and Situation). They need to experience the satisfaction of making challenging decisions within complex situations.

We can create authentic professional writing contexts for students in our English classrooms. When we do so and then guide students as they make writerly decisions about genre, audience, and purpose, we can help them to understand writing as the complex, important (and fun!) task that it can be. For example, during their study of *Romeo and Juliet,* Leah's ninth-grade students worked through several situations by writing in various professional genres. Some of the writings were brief; others were more complex. Students wrote individual status reports to Leah (who wore the hat of project supervisor alongside her usual teaching role) to update her

Students rightly question the relevance of rote exercises that require them to follow forms and formulas without thinking about who they are writing to, or why, or in what capacity.

about their progress on their props project. They wrote instructions to classmates about when and how particular props were to be used. They wrote incident reports to Leah when their groups experienced difficulty, and they documented the logic of their problem-solving process in a collaboratively written

informal report. Finally, as the project drew to a close, students wrote confidential memos to Leah in which they assessed the results of their project and their own performance within the group.

Students who write within authentic contexts such as these are immersed in meaningful composing. They are also engaged in higher-order thinking, decision making, and genre learning. They are creating complex products using the same processes that professionals do. They are not simply reiterating forms and templates; they are creating their own idea of what the genre is, based on their understanding of the audience, situation, and purpose of the task. These are professional-level concepts that can help them problem solve—and write—at a higher level.

Powerful Possibilities

We are enthused by the possibilities that professional writing presents for our classrooms. We are excited that it allows us to emphasize cultural contexts and introduce practical genres, to engage young writers in authentic decisions and processes, and to provide them with opportunities for reaching real audiences and addressing problems in their schools and communities. Additionally, we are excited that professional writing can be integrated seamlessly into classrooms in ways that enhance projects in literature, composition, and language study. We hope that you, too, can imagine how professional writing can build community among students, create opportunities for social justice teaching, and provide occasions to address issues of audience, context, and genre so that students can understand the complexities and joys of writing as an art and a craft.

These goals probably sound familiar, since they align with the ideals our profession holds close. If your students are already writing to make changes in their communities, schools, and society, you are thinking like a professional writer, and this column is for you. If you are guiding students through the creation of nontraditional genres such as brochures, newsletters, proposals, and presentations, then you are already teaching professional writing, and this column is for you. If you haven't done these things yet but they sound interesting, then this column is definitely for you.

We strongly believe in the power of professional writing. We also believe that it can be integrated by teachers in all areas of the English language arts classroom. In future columns, we will introduce *EJ* readers to core ideas of professional writing; highlight teachers who use professional writing in their high school and middle school classrooms; examine key concepts that can enrich and enhance the teaching you already do; and, hopefully, help to spark your imagination about some entirely new projects. We look forward to sharing and to bringing out the voices of teachers and scholars who use professional writing in their classrooms.

Finally, if you include elements of professional writing in your classroom, or see reflections of your own work in what we wrote about in this column, we would love to hear from you. We invite you to visit with us at our session at the NCTE Annual Convention ("Professional Writing in the English Classroom" on Friday, November 19, at 4:00–5:15 p.m.), or you are welcome to drop us a line: Leah Zuidema (lzuidema@dordt.edu) and Jonathan Bush (jbush@wmich.edu).

Jonathan Bush teaches English education and rhetoric/writing studies at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo. His email is jbush@wmich.edu. **Leah Zuidema** first taught professional writing to ninth- through twelfth-graders in her high school English classes. She is now assistant professor of English at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, where she teaches courses in English education and professional writing. Email her at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom

Making Connections with the Boys Who Struggle in Your Classroom

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It was one of those hot, humid Septembers and Jayson was giving a new teacher a hard time. He continuously disrupted the class and all the teacher's attempts at intervention had failed. To alleviate the problem, the assistant principal decided to move Jayson to my class. We hoped that placing Jayson with two experienced teachers (I was team teaching with a colleague at the time) would make a difference.

The next day, Jayson walked in a few minutes after the bell. He was a well-built Latin American boy with dark eyes and hair. Confident and defiant, he looked like trouble. I gave him a seat in the back where he wouldn't bother other students. After reviewing the classroom rules, I asked him to take out a book. He pulled out *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers, a gift to him from the assistant principal. Jayson sat quietly and read. Unfortunately, reading *Monster* was the only work he did for several days.

Reader's notebooks were a key part of our class. Students were required to keep the notebooks to record responses, book talks, notes, and an annotated bibliography of all the books they read during the semester. When I asked Jayson about his reader's notebook, he said he forgot to bring it. Without a notebook, he would have no written work and would earn a failing grade. Anticipating this result, I made a simple yet radical decision: I walked downstairs and got Jayson a notebook. Embarrassed, shocked, and a bit humbled, he took the notebook and said thanks. Over the next few days, I waited and watched. To my surprise, Jayson began to work, completing more and more assignments as the semester progressed.

Questioning My Pedagogy

What had caused his behavior to change? Was it the notebook? A different teacher? A new environment? An accident of timing? I can't be sure, but one thing I do know is that *I* had a different attitude. This may connect to a classroom research project I had recently finished that focused on boys and reading. This project allowed me to take a fresh look at behaviors that had become normalized in my classroom. For example, I had spent many years ignoring the phrase, "This is boring," without considering what might be behind it. I had believed students' likes and dislikes were out of my control. With some boys, my teaching, preaching, and screeching had resulted in failure. I knew I wasn't alone in my frustrations. I had read about the statistics I had experienced: "[Boys] are increasingly behind girls in literacy measures, 'engagement' in school, and college enrollment, and they outnumber girls in suspensions and expulsions, dropout rates, special education placements, and diagnoses of attention deficit disorder" (Hoff Sommers, qtd. in Weaver-Hightower 473).

I had spent many years ignoring the phrase, "This is boring," without considering what might be behind it. I had believed students' likes and dislikes were out of my control.

The nation's focus on the literacy skills of students—especially boys—had produced many notions of reform. School districts were reorganizing and changing curricula to meet the needs of struggling readers and writers. In New York City, where I was teaching, *Balanced Literacy* (a reading and writing workshop) had been

implemented in elementary and middle schools, while the *Ramp-Up* program (an adapted reading workshop model) had been chosen to support struggling readers in the junior and senior schools. I decided to do some teacher-research in one of my *Ramp-Up* classrooms at Flushing High School in Queens, New York. I wasn't exactly sure how to proceed, but I had read a great deal about the topic and decided to give it a shot. My research question was simply, Why do some boys read in my class, while others will not?

The Study

Initially, I modeled my work on the pedagogy of Laura Robb. In *Teaching Reading in Middle School,* she writes, "I use the first three weeks of school to collect information about students' reading lives" (92). In addition to surveys and questionnaires, she reviews standardized test scores and has students write informally. She uses data from all these sources to inform herself about the students. Following Robb's example, I collected completed reading surveys and questionnaires, made observations, and took notes. In addition, I kept a reflective journal to record class behavior and observations, initial conversations, assessments, thoughts, and reflections throughout the study. It was a key factor in studying my participants.

The four boys I chose for my study were friendly, talkative, and had a hard time focusing during independent reading. I felt it would be too difficult to concentrate on the four boys for the duration of the class, so I decided to conduct the research during independent reading—the 15 to 20 minutes of class time when students read a self-selected text. The goal is for students to read as many texts as they can independently.

Independent reading is different from sustained silent reading because instead of reading with the students, the teacher has one-on-one reading conferences with them. Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell describe conferences as "an opportunity to confer with individuals. To confer means to have a genuine conversation with the reader about how the reading is going . . . to understand each student's reading process" (123). Because I was a little uncomfortable leaving my big desk to crouch down next to their little desks, I didn't conduct full conferences at first. Instead, I began with a routine Nancie Atwell calls "status of the class" (107). While students were reading silently, I circulated and had a brief conversation with each student. On a chart/roster, I recorded the title and the page number of the book the student was currently reading. I did this daily and later transcribed the information about the boys in the study into my journal.

While these short conferences provided useful information, my main method of data collection involved the longer (5–7 minutes) one-on-one reading conferences. During a typical conference, I knelt down or pulled up a chair next to a student and asked about his or her reading experience. My questions included the following: What are you reading? How do you like the book so far? Is there anything that is confusing you? What do you like about the text? On the surface, these quiet conversations sound simple, yet they enabled me to learn how to talk to students about books to improve instruction. The choice to confer took greater effort, skill, and concentration than I ever would have imagined, and it rubbed up against my comfort zone.

In the beginning, I felt self-conscious talking about reading with my students—especially the boys (call it a macho thing). What would I say? What would they think? Robb discusses her way of handling this awkwardness. To gain initial momentum, she begins with "Getting to know you conferences," which provide opportunities to discuss books, reading preferences, and choices (103–05). I decided not to put too much pressure on myself to get conferences "right." I'd just pull up a chair and say, "How's it going?"

Each day, after the status of the class reports, I conferred with about three students. Sometimes conferences concentrated on how students liked the book or genre and whether anything was difficult. Sometimes conferences helped wake them up (some students claim that reading makes them sleepy). At the end of each day, I reviewed my roster and noted students' progress, then determined who needed the next conference.

Conferring was uncomfortable at first, but after a few weeks, the boys who were the target of my study seemed to welcome our conferences. They opened up more about their reading and their lives, in and outside of school. I began to understand the pressures and problems that often made reading not only a chore but—for some boys—also an impossibility. Con-

ferences allowed me deeper insight into the roots of some of their classroom behaviors. These insights were beneficial because I was able to increase instructional differentiation, which resulted in incremental, yet significant, successes. For example, one boy read without distractions for an entire class period. Another boy completed a whole book for the first time. I continued to assess the boys and their learning for four months. I wrote about and analyzed my observations in my journal on a weekly basis, which gave me time to review, plan, and note progress. Conducting reading conferences and doing classroom research opened my eyes to things that I had never noticed before. Documenting my pedagogy gave me a clearer perspective about how I could differentiate my instruction to help all students succeed.

Findings

To achieve lasting success with the boys and girls in our classrooms, we need to take the time to see them as individuals. Surveys were a significant resource in accomplishing this goal. Whenever I wanted to know more about their reading and writing lives, I gave the students short surveys. Surveys were useful for learning about their cultures, hobbies, traditions, and what types of books, music, and media interested them. They were also a major asset in planning and adjusting curriculum. Using survey data, I began to cater to some of their interests. I brought nonfiction and popular culture into the classroom. We read articles about Chris Brown, Reggaeton, and the New York Yankees. Teachers are here to serve students, so we might as well try and serve them what they like.

While the surveys helped me to get to know students' likes and dislikes, the best way to build relationships is through one-on-one reading conferences. Conferences keep boys from hiding and can help teachers assess student ability and plan for instruction. Conferences reveal who can read, who can't, and who just doesn't want to. I learned which students were on grade level, who needed glasses, and which students resisted teacher direction. Informal assessments can be conducted while students are writing, working in groups, or engaged with projects. Trust me—the few minutes you stop to talk to your students make a difference. It's all about getting to know them.

Using Popular Culture

Don't be afraid to bring popular music, movies, magazines, and current events into the classroom. Popular culture provides a wealth of interesting topics that boys can use for reading, writing, and discussing. Centering curriculum on student interests is an effective way to enhance student performance and build confidence by allowing boys to share their expertise. It also creates opportunities to expand what it means to be a boy (or girl) by having students look critically at how the media constructs masculinities and femininities. Looking at gender issues and stereotypes in hip-hop lyrics was a big hit.

One thing students particularly enjoyed was studying advertisements in magazines. Teaching students to identify propaganda techniques employed by the media gives students a sense of empowerment. They soon start to see media manipulation everywhere, making them appreciate their newfound knowledge. A good place to start is by deconstructing ads or viewing the recent documentary *Bigger, Stronger, Faster.*

Text Matters

Student conferences revealed that many boys would rather fail than read certain texts; thus, it was evident that text selections were critical to students' reading experiences. My surveys revealed (perhaps unsurprisingly) that boys like books with action and humor. More importantly, they wanted texts they could relate to, texts in which they could imagine themselves as characters. Recently, I read aloud a short story by Walter Dean Myers about a block party. One student was ecstatic because in his old neighborhood he'd attended block parties frequently—and he had loved them. Because of his experiences, he was hooked from the start and couldn't stop talking about the piece. Every time I see him in the hall, he mentions that story.

Another thing I learned is that boys enjoy reading series—from Captain Underpants to Harry Potter. The girls in my class also appreciated series and are often drawn to Twilight, Uglies, and Bluford. Recently I introduced The Bluford Series to my students, who found it irresistible. I love the books because they're about how urban teens deal with the stress and drama of life. The series avoids stereotypes and plots

involve situations that lead to in-depth conversations. One student hid *The Bully* (Langan; from The Bluford Series) under his assigned text for a week. This was the first book he had ever enjoyed in my class, so I pretended I didn't notice (although we talked about it when he finished).

While I've had great success with this series, there are no magic books. I also learned that one text doesn't fit all. One of my classes loved *Brothers in Arms* (Langan), while another loved *Lord of the Flies* (Golding). Each class has its own personality.

Ultimately, It's All about Relationships

Taking the time to get to know students can change the English classroom from a place of frustration and failure to one of excitement and achievement. These approaches require time and hard work—and may even push us out of our comfort zones—but they can enrich, support, and benefit students.

Conferences have helped me encourage a few more boys to experience the joys of reading. Despite the daily pressures of state mandates, I have built better relationships with students and created opportunities to reach out and teach individuals. In addition, conferences provide the much-needed affirmation that someone cares. This is invaluable.

When I decided, as my research question, to ask why some boys read in my class, I had no idea that part of that answer would involve me. Conferences required me to relax my masculine facade so I could reach each boy behind his own mask of masculinity. Revealing my own vulnerability was critical; it enabled the boys to trust me so I could get to know them as readers and as young men. Shifting my role from teacher to researcher provided me with the expertise to help Jayson shift from the role of troublemaker to that of engaged student. Most importantly, I learned that when I connect with my students, I help them to connect with books.

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Teaching Young Adult Literature

Larry, Stargirl, and Montag: Troublemakers in the Classroom!

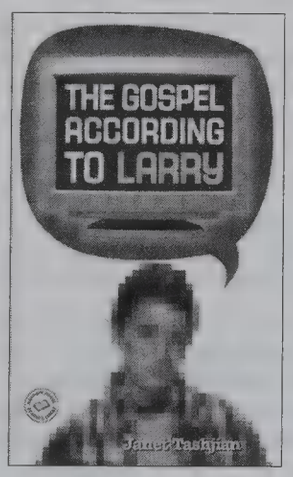
One of the biggest challenges I hear from my teaching colleagues throughout the country is finding literature that is both classroom appropriate *and* enjoyable for students. On the one hand, we have state standards, test scores, and objectives to consider. On the other hand, we have an obligation to today's teens to provide them with novels that will inspire them to become lifelong readers.

Unfortunately, these two concepts don't always jibe with one another. Either student interest wanes or the novels aren't deemed "worthy" by the powers-that-be. But when the pieces do come together, the result can be meaningful and lasting. And there's no better way to get teens fired up than to give them the chance to read about and discuss the world in which they live. The following three novels, Janet Tashjian's *The Gospel According to Larry* (Dell, 2003), Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl* (Laurel-Leaf, 2004), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (Ballantine, 1987), provide students this chance in a way that is both educational and enjoyable.

The Gospel According to Larry (grades 7–10)

Seventeen-year-old Josh Swensen (and his cyber alter-ego Larry) is out to change the world. Backed by his love of Thoreau and his hatred of consumerism, Josh creates a website (www.thegospelaccordingtolarry.com) where he writes his "sermons" that rant about everything from child labor to celebrity worship. The contemporary nature of this story will draw kids in, but don't be fooled—there's much more going on here than first meets the eye.

When the unit begins, I have students bring in magazines and do an analysis on the various advertising techniques used. We pay special attention to concepts such as "target audience" and the influence that celebrity endorsements have on teens. Depending on how much time I want to spend on the unit, sometimes we simply discuss our findings, while other times we make collages focusing on each technique being addressed. It's a simple assignment, but it's one that piques students' interest and lays the foundation for the upcoming projects and discussions.



From this point, students take this information and relate it to television advertising by watching and analyzing the commercials played during their favorite 30 minutes of TV. The following day, we reinforce the concepts previously learned by going into detail about the methods and strategies used by advertisers to entice consumers. And as straightforward as this activity sounds, it is one that leaves an impact on the students and how they look at advertising. Plus, I love it when a student discovers that the only things advertised during football games are trucks, beer, and pizza! (See fig. 1.)

As a follow-up activity, we conclude the week by taking a field trip to a local grocery store to analyze how the store and the products are laid out. Students' eyes are opened when they discover firsthand that the milk is always in the back, the fruit is generally on the side, and that the toilet paper, as ironic as it sounds, is usually a long walk from the front entrance. And

FIGURE 1. "Do You Control Your Stuff, or Does Your Stuff Control You?"

Please type a response (on a separate sheet of paper) to each of the following questions.

1. Look through your T-shirts and identify what percentage of them has some sort of logo on the outside of the shirt.
2. Chart where each shirt is made. This can be located on the inside label.
3. Identify what country has the highest percentage.
4. Explain why this country would have a higher percentage than the others.
5. Watch 30 minutes of TV (or listen to the radio), paying special attention to the commercials. Describe the commercials, focusing on the following ideas:
   a. target audience: who the intended audience is
   b. testimonial technique: using famous people to represent a product
   c. transfer technique: using specific scenes to represent a product
   d. repetition technique: repeating or showing the product name
6. Summarize the show, the time it is on, the target audience, and an example of each technique (if possible).
7. Describe why you think these commercials fit the intended audience.

don't even get me started on how awestruck they are to realize that the cereal aisle goes from sugary and colorful on the bottom shelf (within eye-level of young kids) to healthy and bland up top (for us "colon-conscious" folks).

I also have students write a paper describing the three most important items they own. When we originally discuss the paper, students immediately start talking about how they couldn't live without their "big ticket" items such as laptops and iPods. But once we define what makes something truly valuable (including the ability to replace it), many students change their selections to sentimental possessions such as photographs or childhood "blankies." This fun and creative assignment provides students with the opportunity to discover for themselves what is truly valuable in life. More assignments on consumerism and English language arts may be found in the January 2010 *English Journal*, which is themed "Teaching in a Consumerocracy."

As *The Gospel According to Larry* consumerism unit winds down, students research how much money is spent targeting teens as potential consumers (and we're talking *billions*). This lesson easily lends itself to an economics class in that it provides a great opportunity for students to discuss all the "stuff" they have, how much they paid for it, and where it is made. And as a culminating event, we watch and discuss how the reality-gone-to-the-extreme movie *The Truman Show* (Paramount, 1998) relates to the themes presented within the novel. (See fig. 2.)

If you're looking to increase your students' social awareness (or to ease them into Thoreau), then *The Gospel According to Larry* definitely deserves a place in your curriculum.

Stargirl (grades 6–9)

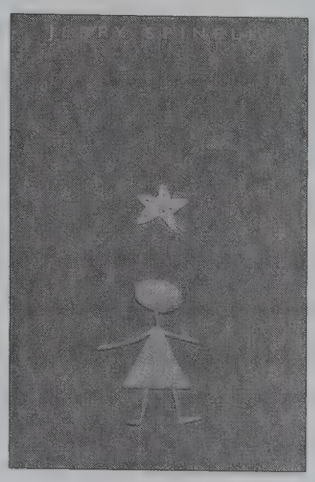
Poor Leo Borlock. Does he go with his heart and fall in love with Stargirl, or does he go with his head and push her away? While the premise of this story is a fairly common one, the situations presented within the novel are done so in a way that challenges teens to reflect on their own social realities (think bullies, peer pressure, and social standing) without being judgmental or heavy-handed. Life is often filled with tough choices,

FIGURE 2. *The Truman Show:* "Is Reality TV about Life, or Is Life about Reality TV?"

1. How does the fictional *The Truman Show* resemble today's reality television? Do you think a show like that is taking it to an extreme, or do you feel we as a society are almost there?
2. Discuss the role of product placement throughout the movie. Is this a realistic portrayal of contemporary advertising?
3. Marlon says, "We are always actors playing someone else—this is just an extra step." Do you agree with his statement?
4. Are Meryl and the other actors unethical for what they do, or are they just doing their jobs?
5. Discuss these two quotes by Christof:

   "We accept the reality with which we are presented."

   "Sea Haven is the way the world should be."
6. Explain Christof's relationship with Truman. Is it a father/son relationship or a master/slave relationship? Give specifics backing your ideas.
7. Put yourself into Truman's shoes. Would you have walked through that door not knowing what awaits you on the other side?
8. What do you think Truman will find in the real world? How will it be better? How will it be worse?



and *Stargirl* illustrates this in a way that is relevant and meaningful to teen readers.

Prior to reading the novel, I have my students play a game I call "Who's Your Buddy?" I divide the total number of students reading the book in all my classes by four, and then I assign each student in each class a number. Their job, within the three days prior to starting the book, is to find the other three students in the grade who share that same number. For example, if I have four classes of 25 (100 total), every student in each class is assigned a number from 1 to 25. So there would be four students with number one, four students with number two, four students with number three, and so on until 25. Each student has to find the other three students who have the same number. And that's the *easy* part.

Once they find their "buddies," they have to share two interesting facts about themselves with each of their new friends (meaning they have to provide a total of six different personal facts—a challenge in itself!). At the end of the three days, students identify who their "buddies" are, and they share their newfound facts about each with the class. And as cool as it is for *you* to learn a bit more about your students, the real value in this assignment comes in the form of what the *students* learn about one another. (See fig. 3.)

Next, as we read the novel, I have students connect Stargirl's random acts of kindness to contemporary society by having them create a chart outlining examples of unselfish acts. This can be something they heard on the radio, saw on TV, or read on the Internet. In addition, they are encouraged to include situations they witness every day from their classmates. And please let your students know that these student acts don't have to be earth-shattering events. Some of the best examples I have seen cite simple acts such as holding the door open for someone, lending lunch money to a friend, or offering help with homework. Too often adolescents get hung up on the negative aspects of life, and this project gives them the opportunity to witness and appreciate the positive side for a change.

Stargirl challenges students to look at the impact, both positive *and* negative, that their actions have on others. It also teaches them that doing the right thing, as easy as that sounds, can often be the hardest thing in the world.

FIGURE 3. *Stargirl:* "Who's Your Buddy?"

The Assignment

You are to find the other three people in the grade who share the same number as you. You may use any ethical technique to accomplish this.

Group Requirements

Meet together as a group.

Find three interesting facts about each of your partners.

Give six facts about yourself to your partners.

Present the information you find to your classmates.

Advice

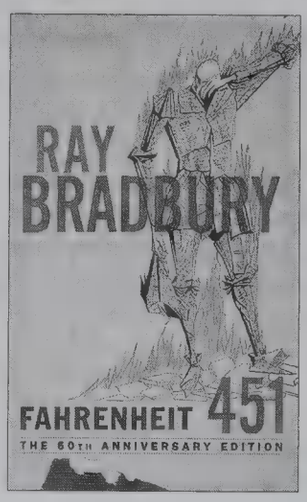
Do not put this off until the last minute. Start trying to find your partners today. Once you find them, identify a common time to meet. This will make the exchange of information easier. Finally, please try to present interesting or little-known facts about yourself.

Fahrenheit 451 (grades 9–12)

Guy Montag lives in a world where entertainment and happiness are the center of everything. (Sound familiar?) He loves his wife, his job, and his government. But after meeting his 16-year-old neighbor Clarisse McClellan, Montag begins to wonder if there's more to the world than just fun. And rather than continuing to accept life as it is, he begins to question why society works as it does. In doing so, Montag begins to see the reality of his situation, and as a result, his world is turned upside down forever.

Pretty serious stuff, right?

And it's just the kind of thing to get teens thinking about their world!



I like to start this unit by discussing the routine nature of daily life. I have students volunteer ideas about how life is often the same day after day—things like when the bus picks them up, their school schedules, and even when they eat often occur on a regular timeline.

And there's nothing wrong with that, unless the routine becomes so mindless that we forget why we do it in the first place. Once this happens, we take one step closer to becoming the society described in *Fahrenheit 451.*

Shortly after discussing the whole "going-through-the-motions-without-thinking" scenario, I spring an awareness test on students in which I ask them a series of what *should be* simple questions. Unfortunately, they soon discover that even the most obvious things in life can be difficult to recall if thinking isn't part of the equation. (See fig. 4.)

FIGURE 4. *Fahrenheit 451:* "Of Course I Know the Answer . . . Wait, Maybe Not"

1. What room number is this class?
2. What time does this class start?
3. What time does this class end?
4. What is your locker number and combo?
5. What time does lunch begin?
6. What time does school end?
7. What is your best friend's cell phone number?
8. What is your zip code?
9. How do you spell the last name of the person on your right?
10. Who is absent from class today?

At about the halfway point in the novel, I break my class into small groups to discuss the pros and cons that technology has brought forth regarding reading and critical thinking. (And yes, you will have to explain that the Internet hasn't always been around.) Once we've discussed both sides, I show an episode of *The Twilight Zone* titled "The Obsolete Man" about a librarian deemed obsolete due to his lack of "useable" skills. This short, 25-minute episode (available on www.CBS.com) allows me to support the view that reading is an essential skill, while doing so in a way that teaches via the use of technology (thus covering both sides of the debate). Plus, the show serves as a great differentiation strategy to help those who might need some clarification about the bigger themes presented in the novel.

Along those same lines, the final writing assignment I give is to write a comparison paper connecting present-day society to the one so presciently described in Bradbury's *451.* Students are amazed at how accurately he envisioned the importance of television, the use of the ATM, and the "snake" that performs surgery. (And be on your toes for that one kid to make the connection between the televised chase scene and an episode of *Cops.*) This text-to-world paper not only links students to what they are reading, it also provides an opportunity for a follow-up discussion about what the future holds for us with regard to technology. In addition to sparking the imagination, this prediction activity also enhances the critical-thinking skills that Bradbury argues for throughout the novel.

While it's clear that Larry, Stargirl, and Montag all have a rebellious side to them, it's also evident that what they represent connects with the teen readers of today.

Connecting Books with Contemporary Teens

So while it's clear that Larry, Stargirl, and Montag all have a rebellious side to them, it's also evident that what they represent connects with the teen readers of today. Each of the three novels discussed above not only provides students with the opportunity to read something they enjoy, but the texts also grant them the chance to learn something about themselves and their world.

And that, to me, is what teaching is all about.

Mike Roberts teaches eighth-grade English at Rowland Hall Middle School in Salt Lake City, Utah. Beyond the classroom, he has spent the past several years presenting to teachers and librarians from across the country about the benefits of using young adult literature in the classroom. For more information about this column, its ideas, or future suggestions, please email him at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

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Cathy Fleischer, Special Imprint Editor

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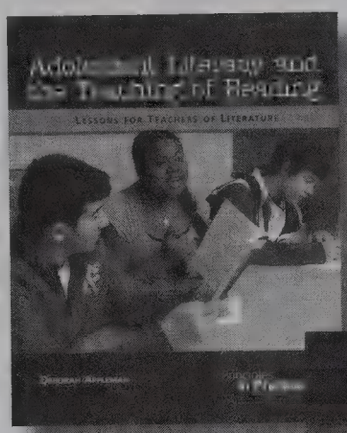

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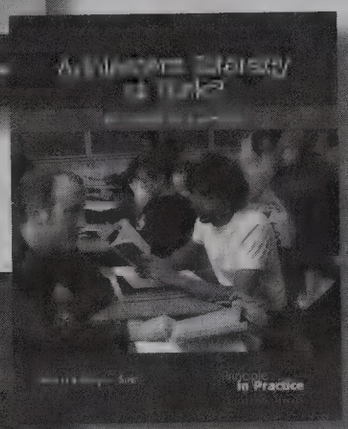

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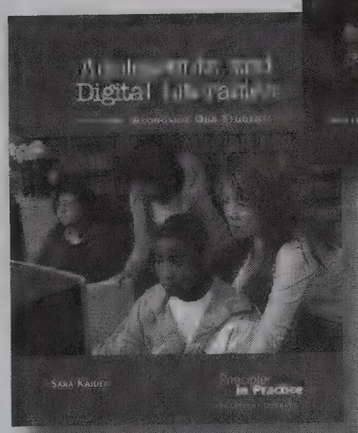

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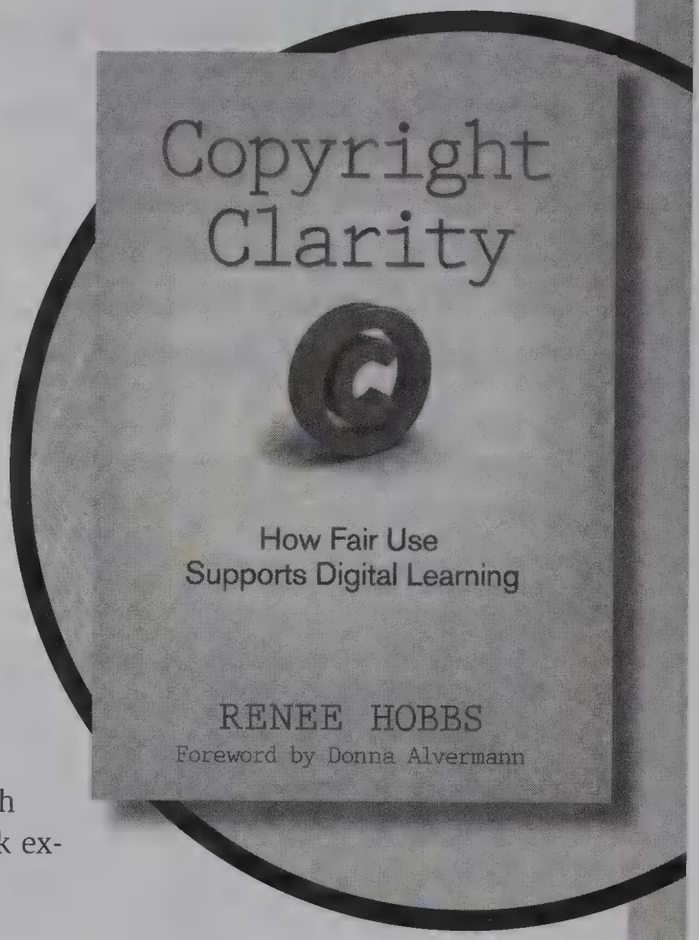
Foreword by Donna Alvermann



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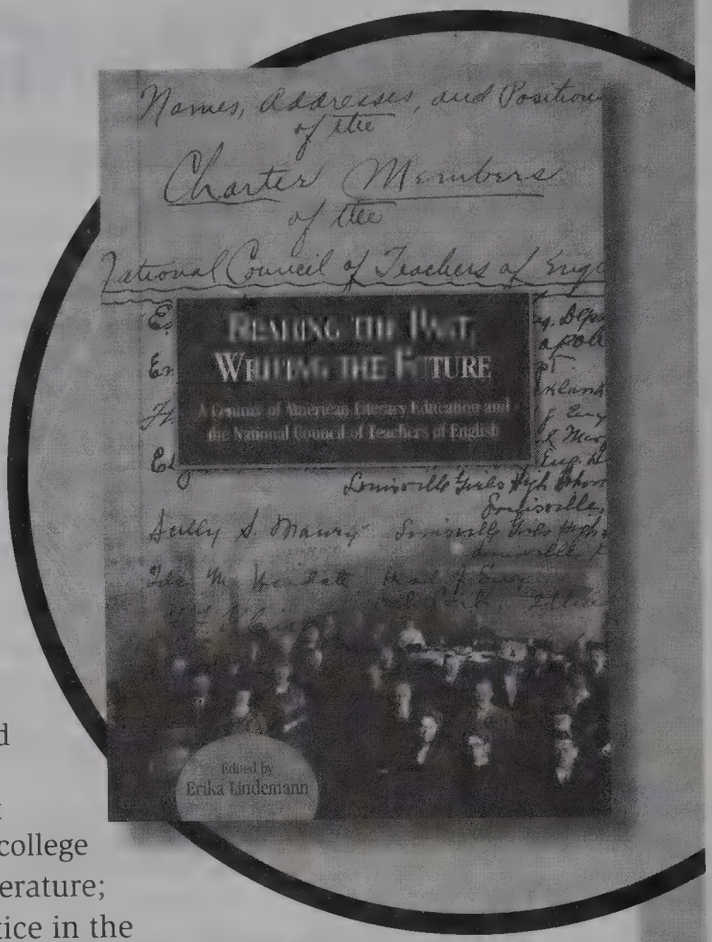

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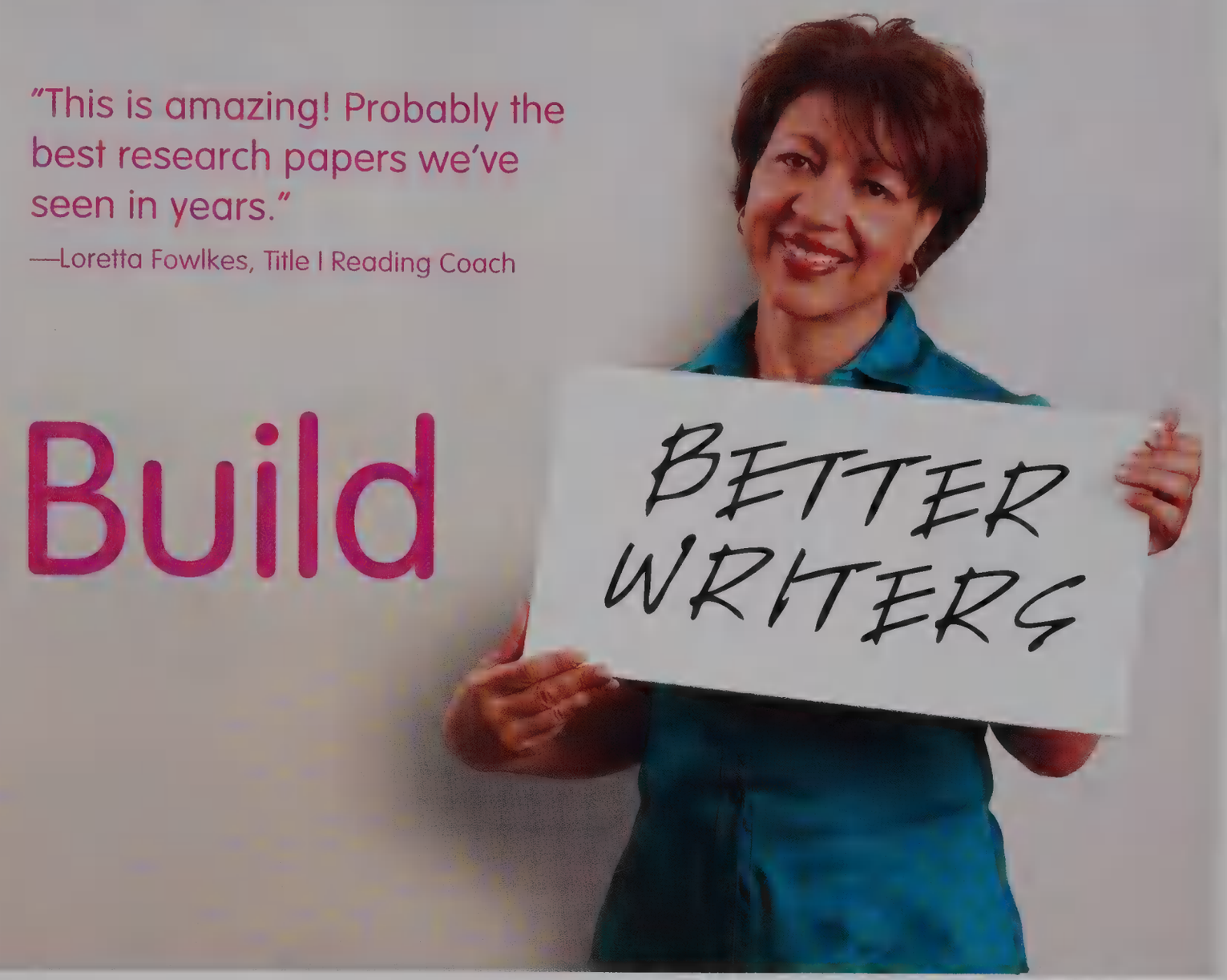

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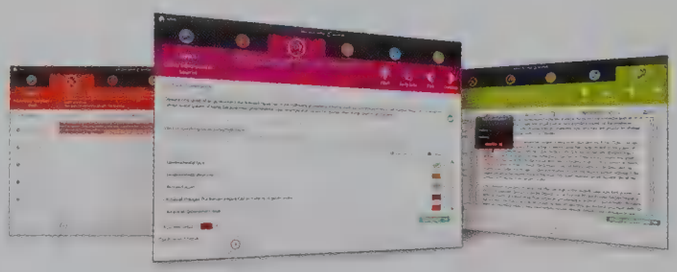

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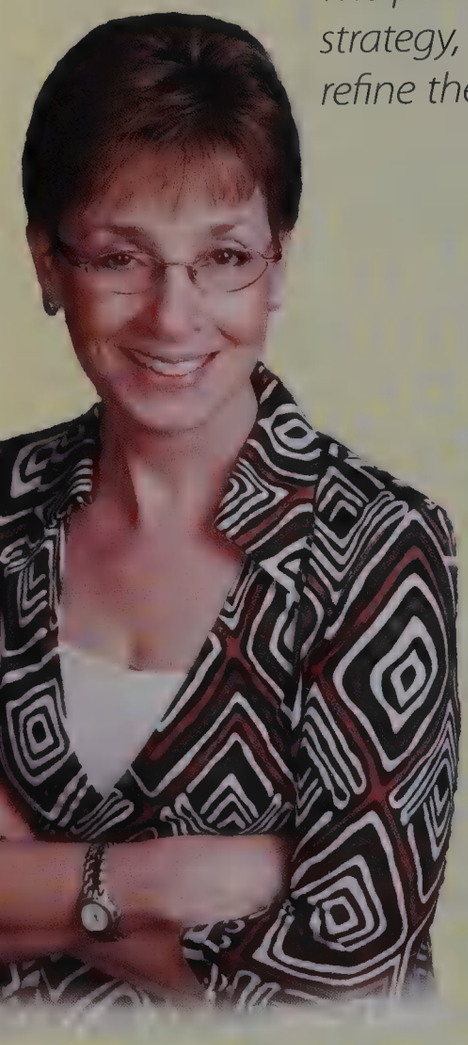

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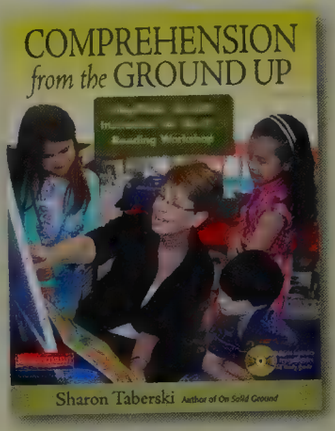

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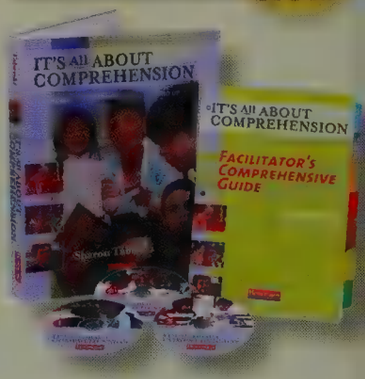

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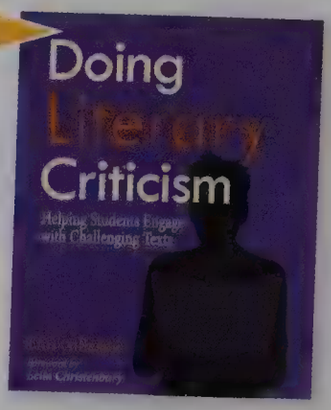

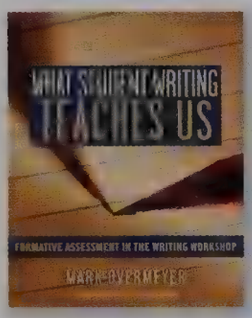

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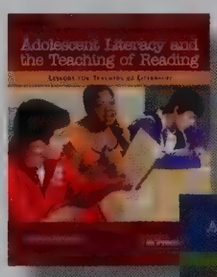

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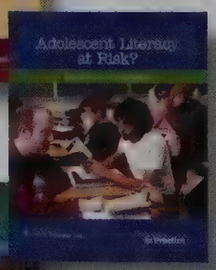

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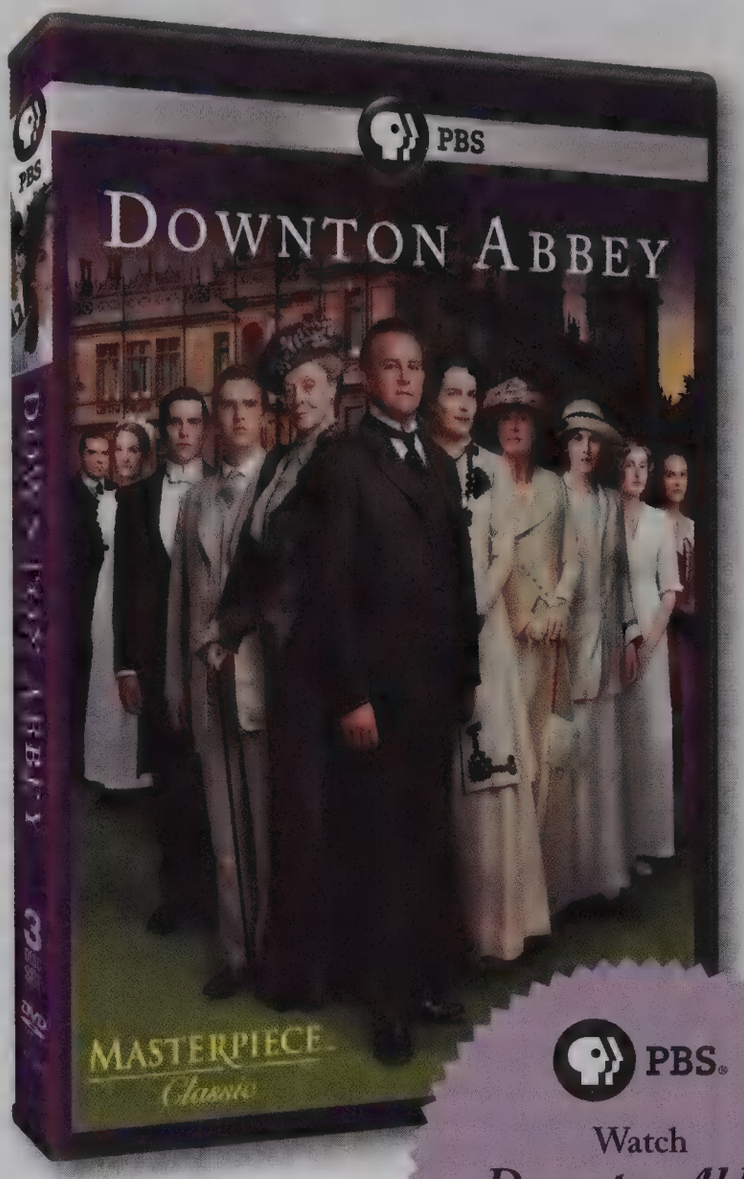

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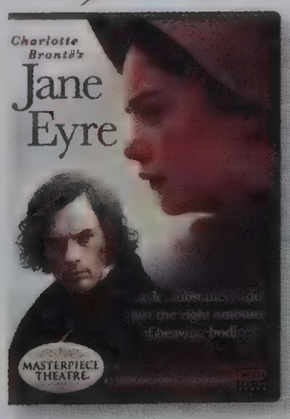

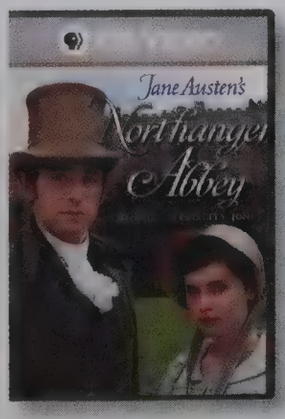

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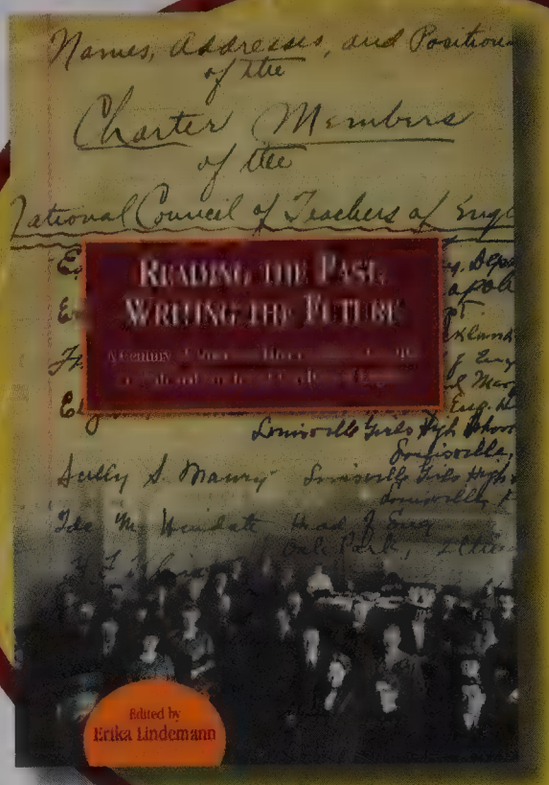

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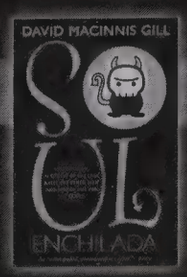

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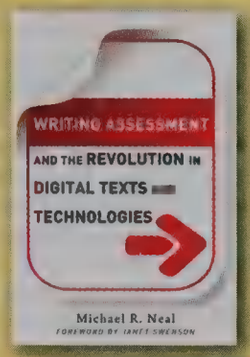

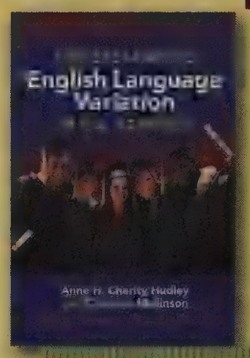

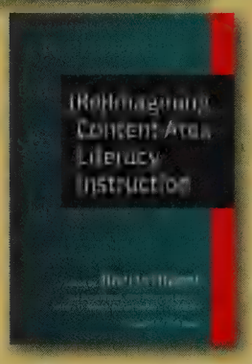

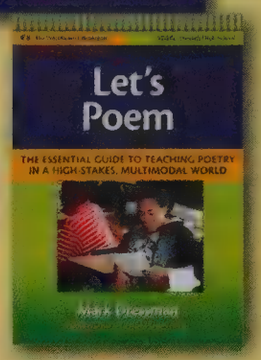

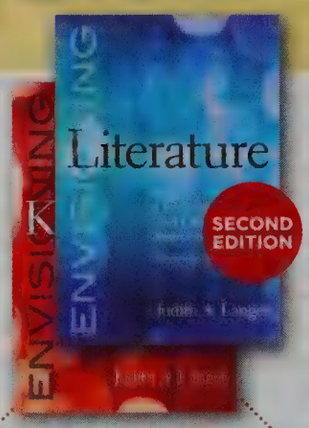

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Manuscripts Detailed information about manuscript submission can be found on the Call for Manuscripts page in this issue. Editorial correspondence should be directed to *English Journal,* Ken Lindblom, Editor, English Department, Stony Brook University, English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu.

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Send manuscripts to

Ken Lindblom, Editor
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Stony Brook University
English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be sent by email as an attachment to English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with standard margins. Word 2000 or later is preferred. Authors using Macintosh software should save their work as Word for Windows. **Paper submissions should be sent only when email is impossible.** Please save copies of anything you send us. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 10 to 15 double-spaced, typed pages in length (approximately 2,500 to 3,750 words).
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the NCTE *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language.* (See address below.)
- Number all pages.
- Use in-text documentation, following the current edition of the *MLA Handbook.* Where applicable, a list of works cited and any other bibliographic information should also follow MLA style.
- List your name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and email address on the title page only, not on the manuscript. Receipt of manuscripts will be acknowledged by email, when possible, or by mail.

English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by two or more outside reviewers. We will attempt to reach a decision on each article within five months. The decision on pieces submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

Prospective contributors should obtain a copy of the *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language* from the NCTE website at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang.

The NCTE Centennial Celebration: Reading the Past, Writing the Future

Publication Date: September 2011
Guest Editor: Leila Christenbury, Virginia Commonwealth University

The National Council of Teachers of English turns 100! Chair of the Task Force for Council History and 2011 Leila Christenbury will commission essays to commemorate a century of literacy education. No unsolicited submissions will be considered for this special issue.

Students Reading and Writing for Their Own Purposes

Deadline: March 15, 2011
Publication Date: November 2011

One of the unique aspects of English language arts is that its focus on developing literacy skills allows teachers to integrate students' personal interests and goals directly into the curriculum. In fact, NCTE's Learning Standard 12 is about just that: "Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information)." As important as helping students to develop an inclination and ability to use their literacy skills for their own purposes is, some would argue it's among the least emphasized of the twelve NCTE Standards. This standard is not easily assessed, nor do prepackaged curricula generally accommodate students' individual goals and interests. To raise awareness of and share strategies for fulfilling this important standard, the November 2011 *English Journal* is devoted to the ways in which teachers can and should incorporate students' purposes in English classes.

How have you creatively integrated students' personal goals and desires into your reading and writing assignments? What methods have you developed for soliciting students' individual interests and helping students to advance them in ways appropriate to English language arts? How have you helped students understand that literacy can help them achieve their own goals? What is the effect on the quality of student work of incorporating students' purposes into your curriculum? How have you connected students with people and organizations outside your classroom: in the larger school, the community, national and regional organizations, online communities, and so on? How have media and Web 2.0 technologies enhanced your ability to engage students personally in ELA? Any article addressing the ways in which students' own purposes may be highlighted in English class is welcome for this issue.

Celebrating a Century of *English Journal*

Publication Date: January 2012

The first *English Journal* was published in January 1912. In the January 2012 issue, we'll offer critical perspectives on 100 years of English teaching theory and practice, retrospectives from former *EJ* editors, and more. We will not accept unsolicited manuscripts for this issue, but those interested in writing for this special issue should contact *EJ* editor Ken Lindblom at kenneth.lindblom@stonybrook.edu.

The Community in the Classroom

Deadline: July 15, 2011
Publication Date: March 2012

Classroom community is an essential ingredient in a healthy, productive English class. In a classroom with a strong sense of community, students will write with more energy; review the writing of their peers with more effort, honesty, and sensitivity; and spur each other on to better accomplishments and have more fun in the process. Students who feel a sense of duty to their classmates and feel respected by their peers and teachers will be more open about their thoughts and amenable to learning new ideas. In what innovative ways have you established and maintained classroom community? What works of literature or writing assignments have you used to help students better understand and engage in the class as members of a larger community?

The community outside the school is also an important part of an English class. The community raises the children we educate, pays for our schools, employs our graduates, and supports (or impedes) our teaching efforts. A positive connection between the English classroom and the outside community can greatly enhance students' (and teachers') experiences in many ways. And, instilling in students a sense of duty and service to the community can richly enhance those communities far into the future. How have you gotten local leaders and businesspeople involved in projects associated with your English class? How have you involved parents or other family members in helping students develop ELA skills and knowledge? In what ways have you encouraged students to engage in community service (local, national, global, in person or online) in ways that enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, or presenting skills?

For this issue of *English Journal,* we welcome articles that speak to the ways in which the concept of community can improve students' knowledge and abilities in English.

General Interest
May submit any time

We publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles foreground classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

Ongoing Features

Speaking My Mind: We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear with your photo in a future issue of *English Journal*. We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects.

Student Voices: This is a forum for students to share their experiences and recommendations in short pieces of 300 words. Teachers are encouraged to submit the best responses from their classes, not whole class sets, please. Individual students are welcome to submit as well. Topics are as follows:

- How and when has an English assignment allowed you to write, read, or present something that was truly important to you? (Deadline: March 15, 2011)
- What new information have you learned about your community or a person in your community as a result of an English class assignment? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)

Teacher to Teacher: This is a forum for teachers to share ideas, materials, and activities in short pieces of 300 words. Topics are as follows:

- What unusual personal purpose has a student been able to fulfill as part of your English class? (Deadline: March 15, 2011)
- How have you used an English assignment to get students more involved in the community or members of the community more involved in your classroom? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)

Original Photography

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be sent as 8" × 10" black-and-white glossies or as an electronic file in a standard image format at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer's name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

Original Cartoons

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. Line drawings in black ink should be submitted on $8^1/_2$" × 11" unlined paper and be signed by the artist.

Columns and Column Editors

Challenging Texts
Editor: P. L. Thomas

Franz Kafka proclaimed that a "book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." The authors and texts we bring into our classrooms and the acts of literacy that students perform about and because of those texts are essential aspects of creating classrooms where students become critical readers and critical writers. This column will explore the authors and texts we choose that confront the world and the worldviews of students. We also explore various theoretical approaches to literature that challenge and energize students and teachers.

Contributors should explore and share their classroom practices that address questions such as, What authors and texts confront the world and students' assumptions? What texts expand students' perceptions of and assumptions about genre? What texts confront both big ideas and the art and craft of writing? How does critical pedagogy look in literature classrooms? What literary theories do you find most generative?

Submit an electronic Word file attached to your email to the column editor, P. L. Thomas, at paul.thomas@furman.edu. Contributors are encouraged to query the column editor and share drafts of column ideas as part of the submission process.

Mentoring Matters
Editor: Thomas M. McCann

Some critics use the disturbing phrase "eating their young" to refer to the way some school leaders and veteran teachers treat new teachers. The image refers to the regrettable practice of allowing the newcomer to endure the least desirable conditions in a school or department. In contrast, caring veteran teachers will be sensitive to the need to foster growth and to promote a sense of self-efficacy in new colleagues. The development of any teacher is not complete after departure from a teacher preparation program. Professional growth continues for years, and supportive colleagues can play a significant role in influencing the development, satisfaction, and retention of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This column invites contributors to offer practicing teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs their insights about how to mentor and support early-career English teachers, including reports from early-career teachers about their positive mentoring experiences. We especially encourage specific suggestions for practices that will help veteran teachers to support newer colleagues in developing positive relationships with students, contending with pressures to conform to test-driven curricula, handling an enormous workload, and forming collaborative relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and parents.

We invite column contributions of 500–1,500 words addressing themes about mentoring and supporting early-career teachers. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Thomas M. McCann at tmccann1@niu.edu.

Off the Shelves
Editor: Mark Letcher

We are living in a new golden age of young adult literature. Edgy and engaging titles by authors both emerging and established have been pushing the field of young adult literature (YAL) to places we've never seen before. Teen readers are seeing more innovative formats and genre-blending in their reading, are exposed to authors from around the world, and are blurring the lines between previously established "teen" and "adult" fiction.

There may be no better time to celebrate and promote the diversity, characters, issues, and pure literary craftsmanship that YAL offers its audience, and our hope is that you will help us contribute to the conversation.

This column will explore a wide range of topics related to literature written for and/or read by young adults, with a strong emphasis on recently published works. We particularly welcome the voices and experiences of secondary teachers, for whom YAL provides vital classroom reading, suggestions for eager and reluctant students, and engaging personal reading material.

Submissions of 500–1,500 words, inquiries, and suggestions for future column topics should be directed to Mark Letcher at mark.letcher@purduecal.edu.

Poetry
Editor: Anne McCrary Sullivan

In her poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," Naomi Shihab Nye reminds us that "poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes, / they are sleeping." Look inside your shoes, your desk drawers and kitchen cabinets, the hallways of your school, the grocery stores and garbage dumps of your community. "Find" some poems and send them to *EJ*. Choose those that seem a fit, either explicitly or implicitly, with announced themes of upcoming *EJ* issues. We are looking for well-crafted original poems in any style, serious or humorous, written by teachers, students, or those who love them. We do not consider previously published poems or simultaneous submissions.

Send by email attachment, for blind review, up to five poems with only phone number and initials on the page. In your email message, include brief biographical information. Poets whose work is published will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Send submissions to EJPoetry@nl.edu. Send correspondence to Anne McCrary Sullivan at ASullivan@nl.edu.

Professional Writing in the English Classroom
Editors: Jonathan Bush and Leah Zuidema

Professional writing in the English classroom is rich with possibilities. Students can learn to attend carefully to audience, purpose, and situation through all genres of writing, but these rhetorical concerns are especially relevant in professional writing contexts. This column focuses on the teaching of professional writing—writing that solves day-to-day problems, accomplishes work, and enables changes in organizations and communities. Professional writing instruction involves much more than teaching memos, proposals, or résumés; it can also be a way to teach for engaged, ethical citizenship. It encompasses ideas consistent with best practices in our discipline—allowing students to think creatively and critically within complex rhetorical situations. It values multiple genres, textual conventions, and visual design. Through professional writing, students can address real issues (big or small) and work to effect change by writing to authentic audiences.

Professional writing can be combined with other, more traditional studies of writing, literature, and language. This column helps readers who seek to teach professional writing concepts and to expand their teaching to include new projects and genres. We welcome contributions from those who teach professional writing as well as those who see echoes of professional writing concepts in their other work with writing, literature, and language. Please send inquiries, submissions of 500–1,500 words, or suggestions for future column topics to Jonathan Bush at jbush@wmich.edu or Leah Zuidema at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom
Editor: Julie Gorlewski

Research provides a lens through which teachers can better understand our pedagogical successes and failures. Research illuminates the social and political contexts of education, enhancing our appreciation of students, their families, and the communities we serve. The principles of research offer a foundation for reflective practice.

Classrooms are laboratories for teaching and learning. In this era of accountability, it is important for teachers to apply research to practice. We must be collaborators in the process of deciding what works, not merely consumers of products deemed "research-based." In the spirit of a critical theoretical approach, this column will seek both to clarify and to problematize research-based practices.

Submissions for this column might include an informal mini-study or a story about an attempt—successful or not—to conduct classroom research. Contributors should focus on a classroom application of professional scholarship by considering these questions: What worked (and didn't work) in my classroom? Why? How do I know? Also welcome are short reviews of recently published books that contributors believe can enhance teachers' classroom research practices. Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words.

Authors, especially new contributors, are encouraged to submit ideas for columns. Send inquiries or submissions to gorlewsj@newpaltz.edu.

Success with ELLs
Editor: Margo DelliCarpini

English educators face increasing linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In fact, enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in the nation's public schools between the years 1990 and 2000 grew by 105%, compared to a 12% overall growth rate among the general school population. ELLs enter our classrooms with a variety of prior school experiences, cultural expectations, and literacy experiences. Making the English language arts curriculum accessible to ELLs can pose unique challenges. However, when teachers implement strategies that target the needs of ELLs, all students can benefit.

This column will be a place where classroom teachers can find helpful ideas for teaching ELLs. Please submit manuscripts regarding challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream English classes and how you have developed innovative strategies to address their needs while enhancing the learning environment for all learners. Please share materials and practices that you have found to be especially effective for your ELLs, reports of successful collaborative instruction, motivational strategies that you use, and ways you connect content to ELLs' lives. Secondary-level English teachers are especially encouraged to submit their ideas. New authors who have ideas for columns that need development are encouraged to contact the editor. Send ideas or complete submissions of 500–1,500 words to Margo DelliCarpini at margo.dellicarpini@lehman.cuny.edu.

Teaching Young Adult Literature
Editor: Mike Roberts

As English teachers, we are constantly faced with the challenge of teaching literature that is both thought-provoking *and* entertaining. With today's YA literature better than ever, now is the time to help students discover the joy—and sometimes the pain—that comes with reading a great book. YA literature can provide students with a chance to engage in reading that is meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable. Plus, YA literature can inspire energized discussions about topics students feel passionate about.

This column will explore *teaching ideas and strategies* for some of today's newest and most popular young adult literature. This is not a column that reviews literature; it describes effective ways of *teaching* young adult literature. We encourage submissions of 1,800–2,500 words that focus on effective ways of incorporating YA literature into the curriculum. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Mike Roberts at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

From the Editor

Ken Lindblom
Stony Brook University
State University of New York
kenneth.lindblom@stonybrook.edu

Driving through New Woodstock in upstate New York, I noticed what appeared to be an outdoor book sale at the local public library. On slightly closer inspection, it seemed to be an outdoor reading area. But when I stopped the car and walked up for a closer look, I found an inspired work of art called *Stacks*: "These Trees Shall Be My Books" (the subtitle is a quote from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*). Created by artist David Harper, and appearing on the cover of this issue of *English Journal* devoted to Green English, *Stacks* is a beautiful reminder of how the acts of reading and writing are figuratively and literally connected to the natural world. *Stacks* is now located in the Stone Quarry Art Park outside Cazenovia, New York, and its twisted branches, books, and blocks of wood—all reclaimed—make a stunning statement about the Earth's contributions to our communicative efforts. With books, like so much else, the medium is the message. No word yet on whether Harper plans to add a recycled Kindle to the sculpture.

The articles in this issue use appreciating, protecting, and improving the environment (rural, suburban, and urban) as real-world contexts for developing students' writing, speaking, presenting, and designing skills.

The sculpture *Stacks* is an ideal visualization of what the authors in this issue are doing in their *EJ* articles and in their English classrooms: incorporating relevant environmental themes, issues, and actions into their instruction in English language arts.

While the Green Movement is a somewhat contemporary idea, nature themes have been a part of literature since the beginning. However, Green English, or "Greening English," as Heather E. Bruce puts it in her "*EJ* in Focus," means more than focusing on nature, inspiring beautiful poetry, reading travel literature, and helping students appreciate the world around them—although it includes all those things, too. The articles in this issue use appreciating, protecting, and improving the environment (rural, suburban, and urban) as real-world contexts for developing students' writing, speaking, presenting, and designing skills; they seek to help students compose personal metaphors from nature that will encourage them to develop deeper connections with the land; they apply interdisciplinary learning to examinations of place; they study the language that has arisen from recent attempts to encourage people to recycle and seek renewable sources of energy; they seek to make students aware of the ways in which community is as much about the physical context as it is about the social context.

None of these articles give over the ELA curriculum to a sociopolitical agenda. Instead, they seek to raise the importance of one of the most significant aspects of being human: living in a natural world. The life of the mind is the life of the land.

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STACKS

David Harper, 2005

Cazenovia College Sculpture Court, Cazenovia, New York

"These trees shall be my books."—William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

As one of a multitude of quite amazing results of millennia of evolution, we humans owe our allegiance and respect to this fragile planet. All we are has roots in the earth. Our accumulated knowledge has been recorded on stone, clay, plant fibers, petroleum products, and other arrangements of elementary particles. Symbols printed on paper are still a common form of preserving and sharing knowledge. Paper, books, shelves that hold them, and seats we take to study them have been fashioned from fibers created by solar-powered life-forms that transform the elements in soil and air. The energy and matter loaned to us and all these other creations will pass through us to unimagined future forms. This installation is an attempt to express my appreciation for this miraculous world.—David Harper

These photographs of *Stacks* are by David Harper.

Green(ing) English: Voices Howling in the Wilderness?

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> Civilization has been slow to give up on our myth of the Earth's infinite generosity. . . . Rather grandly, we have overdrawn our accounts.
>
> —*Barbara Kingsolver, "Water Is Life"*

> If the world we love is going to be saved—urban, rural, and wild—it will be by people standing their ground in the places they love, speaking out and digging in.
>
> —*Terry Tempest Williams, "Wi4 Tribute to Indie Booksellers & Local First Initiatives"*

Most of us agree that one of our primary aims in English teaching is to increase students' understanding of what it means to be more fully human. We speak eloquently about the roles we play as teachers to deepen students' understanding of life and to realize the importance of universal human concerns through literary interpretation. We work tirelessly to enhance students' awareness of different cultural values and to help them develop acceptance, empathy, and respect for others through meaningful reading and writing activities. We are constantly in search of imaginative and rhetorical literature that will urge students to stay emotionally alive and morally sensitive, that is, essentially human, in the face of the pressures of an increasingly technological and interconnected society, with its mass media and mass culture that threaten to blunt the mind's powers of critical thinking and reduce them to a state of indiscriminate conformity.

To accomplish these ends discipline-wide, we have integrated insights gleaned from studies of race, gender, class, sexuality, language—among other social identities—to engage the fullness of humanity in our teaching and learning work. Nevertheless, our humanity is keenly dependent on our biology; success of human cultures is unmistakably linked to the viability of our geophysical world. Our habitat—the planet—is in deep trouble; we have pushed human carrying capacity to its limits. Human consumption and its frequently toxic byproducts have sullied our home place nearly beyond repair.

Consider just some of the glaring issues we face because of overpopulation and over-consumption of resources and energy: Climate change. Runaway toxic oil spills in Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Mexico. Poisonous disasters of mind-numbing scale—the Bhopal gas tragedy; nuclear meltdowns at Chernobyl and Three Mile Island; chemicals leaching from a dump site upon which homes and schools were built in Love Canal, New York; hexavalent chromium contamination of drinking water in Hinkley, California; asbestos poisoning in Libby, Montana; contamination from above-ground atomic bomb testing in Nevada that has given rise to a range of health difficulties among "downwinders" (not to forget the health concerns from radiation sickness suffered by survivors of A-bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki); a toxic plastic garbage island twice the size of Texas fouling the Pacific. Dwindling potable water resources. Heightened air pollution and increases in

Smoke billowing from nuclear reactors. © JupiterImages/Photos.com.

respiratory diseases such as asthma. Devastating hurricanes and floods attributed to changing weather patterns as a result of global warming. Extended droughts. Famine and hunger. Questions about food safety. Extinction of flora and fauna species at unprecedented rates. A doomsday seed vault in the arctic to protect food species from war and disaster. Research linking ADHD to certain toxins in the environment. Alarming increases in rates of cancer and other health risks tied to environmental contamination and degradation. These environmental and health problems are largely of our own making; they are a byproduct of human cultures and the result of a crisis in ethical decision-making (Worster).

Yet in literature and language arts classes at the secondary level, where we do not hesitate to study the impact of ethical mores in human lives, where we do not hesitate to teach respect for life, we have fairly well ignored our impact on the natural world or our relationships with it. If we look at the major publications of our profession, we would never suspect that "the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, [we] might never know that there was an earth at all" (Glotfelty xvi). Ecological literacy expert David W. Orr contends that "all education is environmental education" both by inclusion and exclusion (*Ecological Literacy* 90). By what is included or excluded, we teach students that they are "a part of or apart from" the natural world (12). The implicit environmental education, which English language arts students are receiving through exclusion, is that our ecological relationship with our habitat is either a matter of little importance or something only relevant to "science geeks." As high school English teacher Clark Meyer of Atlanta explained when asked to address his faculty about (the lack of) environmental education at his school:

> Literature—with its timeless role of examining the human condition—has always evolved to address the significant issues before each generation. In our curriculum, then, we rightly read and discuss works that deal thoughtfully with weighty and complex themes like race and gender and war. But as contemporary writing rapidly evolves to raise new questions about humanity's role as a citizen of the ecological community, this new environmental literature has yet to be significantly included in the mainstream educational canon. That omission, I think, does send a message. (9 Sept. 2008)

We disregard our planet and the dangers we face by exploiting it to our and our students' imminent peril. Each new disaster seems to mock us. How many disasters will it take before we cease to be shocked and start to behave differently (Kingsolver)? We must begin to teach English "as if our lives depended on it" (Rich) because quite literally they do. We must begin to teach English to show respect both for human life and for our environment because to fail to do so will likely send us the way of the dinosaurs. Even as the planet will rejuvenate over time, we as a species will not. Cheryll Glotfelty, the United States's first professor of Literature and the Environment, explains that "we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems. . . . Either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating

countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse . . . as environmental problems compound, work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous. If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem" (xx–xxi). Getting through the environmental crises we now face requires understanding human impact on our environment. It requires understanding how ethical systems that promote overconsumption of energy and resources ignore a "land ethic," which is as Aldo Leopold articulated it in *A Sand County Almanac*—"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community [soils, water, plants and animals]. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (262). It means teaching the persuasive narratives and communicative tools that might promote empathy for both human and nonhuman species, for the soils, water, and air on which all of life depends to avoid human and other species' ultimate extinction and to promote meaningful systemic reforms.

Our expertise in addressing the aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical implications of the most pressing human concerns of our time enable us also to reach toward embrace of environmental problems.

As English teachers, we may not think that we have direct power to reform these systems. However, it is well within our capacity to help others understand the ethics that support either "man against nature" or a reciprocal interdependence of human nature, the land, and nonhuman species. It is well within our capacity "[to consider] nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama" (Glotfelty xxi). It is well within our capacity to think about human character as environmentally or ecologically embedded rather than immune. And it is well within our capacity to introduce students to writers that can open minds to the notion that human actions affect the ecosystems we depend on and "proclaim a lofty new mission for self-government: to energize and empower the 'millions to whom the beauty and the ordered world of nature still have meaning that is deep and imperative'" (Carson, qtd. in Gore xvii). English teachers specialize in questions of vision, values, ethical understanding, meaning, point of view, tradition, imagination, culture, language and literacy—"keys to today's environmental crises at least as fundamental as scientific research, technological know-how, and legislative regulation" (Buell 5). Our expertise in addressing the aesthetic, ethical, and sociopolitical implications of the most pressing human concerns of our time enable us also to reach toward embrace of environmental problems. In doing so, we can engage those in whose power change will occur more likely than scientific explanations alone might. It is in these ways that we can make a substantial contribution to environmental awareness and citizenship.

So where might we begin?

The relatively new fields of ecocriticism in literary studies and ecocomposition in rhetoric and composition studies provide a usable foundation for those of us interested in green(ing) English. Nevertheless, even suggesting that interest in the environment within English studies is a relatively new concern is somewhat misleading. Contemplation of nature has been "a dominant or at least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being" (Buell 2). Therefore, we might look differently at some of our most beloved and frequently taught writers in the British and American Romantic tradition—Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Dickinson, Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman—and herald them for their "love of nature." And we might easily take up the greater environmental significance of "setting" rather than relegating it offhandedly to "the locale in which the story takes place" or as a mere "backdrop for the human drama" of the narrative (Buell 4; Glotfelty).

Beyond shifting our traditional perspectives toward a heightened ecological gaze, however, there are several pedagogical doors that ecocriticism and ecocomposition have opened, some of which I review here for their environmentally directed teaching and learning possibilities in English language arts. There are too many approaches and subjects to cover adequately in this space; however, I will briefly explore six that seem most promising for study of English language arts at the secondary level: ecological literacies; reading green; "nature" writing or environmental literatures; insights from ecocomposition; place-based reading and writing, including indigenous literatures; environmental justice movements; and war as an environmental concern.

Ecological Literacies

Literacy is the ability to read. Numeracy is the ability to count. Ecological literacy, according to Garrett Hardin, is the ability to ask, "What then?"

—*David W. Orr,* Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World

To understand what we need to know to green English, I would say both simply and profoundly: read David W. Orr's foundational *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World.* Orr asserts that reading, writing, and calculating are necessary but primarily "indoor" skills. "Ecological literacy . . . requires the more demanding capacity to observe nature with insight, a merger of landscape and mindscape"—learning to love it (86). It is driven by a search for knowledge, a sense of wonder, and "sheer delight in being alive in a beautiful, mysterious, bountiful world." This sense of wonder is rooted in emotions or "'biophilia,' what E. O. Wilson terms an affinity for the living world" (86). Orr claims that without that affinity and nourishment of a sense of kinship with all living things, literacy of any other sort will not much help. He also states that development of an affinity for the living world is dependent on aesthetic appreciation of all that is beautiful and alive in the world. It means developing a sense of place, which requires more direct contact with the natural aspects of a place—with soils, landscape, and wildlife. He argues for "more urban parks, summer camps, green belts, wilderness areas, public seashores . . . trees, river parks, meandering greenbelts, and urban farms where people can see, touch, and experience nature in a variety of ways" (89).

Orr posits in *Ecological Literacy* six principles or frames of mind that should be applied to educational practice in order to develop ecological literacy:

1. "[A]ll education is environmental education" (90).
2. "[E]nvironmental issues are complex and cannot be understood through a single discipline or department" (90).
3. "[F]or inhabitants, education occurs in part as a dialogue with a place and has the characteristics of good conversation" (90).
4. "[T]he way education occurs is as important as its content" (91).
5. "[E]xperience in the natural world is both an essential part of understanding the environment, and conducive to good thinking" (91).
6. "[E]ducation relevant to the challenge of building a sustainable society will enhance the learner's competence with natural systems" (92).

One might wonder how the development of such skills and awarenesses relates to English teaching. We teach aesthetic awareness, respect for life, awareness of worlds that our students may only encounter through the literatures we teach. Ecological literacy requires comprehension of the dynamics of human interactions with the world. It requires a thorough understanding of the ways in which people and whole societies have staged an urge to power and become destructive through "the paradox of rational means harnessed to insane ends [as] portrayed in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* Melville's *Moby Dick,* and Dostoevsky's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" (Orr, *Ecological Literacy* 93). Students cannot be considered ecologically literate, Orr asserts, until they have read Thoreau, Kropotkin, Muir, Albert Howard, Alfred North Whitehead, Gandhi, Schweitzer, Aldo Leopold, Lewis Mumford, Rachel Carson, E. F. Schumacher, and Wendell Berry. And that, obviously, is where we come in. What we do in English language arts is all about noticing, responding to the moment, listening and paying attention, observing, learning to communicate, understanding how things relate to each other. It is about developing the habits of mind for looking closely, thinking critically, thinking by analogy, changing scale, and theorizing—figuring out why something works the way it does or why do we do it this way instead of another (Ruef). This at its essence is what ecological literacy requires. There are real, tangible connections upon which we might shift our present gaze to think with a more eco-critical eye in the teaching that we do. The following sections offer some practical suggestions embedded in the work of many.

There are real, tangible connections upon which we might shift our present gaze to think with a more eco-critical eye in the teaching that we do.

Reading Green

Literature can help us think about how we "relate to places, other people, and other species . . . showing us who we are and challenging us to imagine who we might be" (Anderson, Slovic, and O'Grady xxi). "Reading green"—which I define as focusing on "environments" in literary expression—can help us to explore our relationship to the environment and the role literature can play in shaping cultural responses to environmental realities.

"Reading green" involves both selection and approach. The imaginative and rhetorical selections we choose to read with students and how we choose to read these literatures demonstrate what we value. A primary way to "read green," then, is to examine what is commonly called "nature" writing or environmental literature, as I discuss further below.

Other ways of "reading green" may seem less obvious but are readily applicable to any selections we might teach in the classroom. These methods for reading green generally include ideas for approaching literature in ways that explore the relationship between literary expression and the world beyond human affairs, meaning that which encompasses all the surroundings or environments in which human and nonhuman species carry on their daily lives. As ecocritic Glen A. Love writes,

> In some of the literary texts that we study and discuss, this enveloping natural world is part of the subject on the printed page before us. But even when it is not, it remains a given, a part of the interpretive contexts, whether or not we choose to deal with it in our study and teaching. . . . As the circumstances of the natural world intrude ever more pressingly into our teaching and writing, the need to consider the interconnections, the implicit dialogue between the text and the environmental surroundings, becomes more and more insistent. (16)

With this approach, the most likely tactic for reading green would be to analyze how the characters, actors, and agents in the literatures we teach affect the setting or stage of the narrative, as mentioned earlier, or, conversely, how the setting of the narrative avails characters and agents to behave in particular ways. We might imagine scenarios by which we can explore the ramifications of human behavior as depicted in the settings of literature for the planet, for landscape, for flora and fauna, and the impact of "nature" on human experience. We might engage with students in reading green through dialogue with them from a more ecocritically informed perspective about literature and its relationships to nature and environmental concerns. For example, T. S. Eliot stated, "But for the River, [*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*] might be only a sequence of adventures with a happy ending. A river, a very big and powerful river, is the only natural force that can wholly determine the course of human peregrination. . . . Thus the River makes the book a great book. . . . Mark Twain is a native, and the River God is his God" (290). To consider with students how the river itself is a character in this greatest of American novels (Hemingway) and how it affects Jim's and Huck's movement and relationship throughout the narrative would be to consider a green reading. One might also reciprocally consider while studying *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* how the effects of human development on the Mississippi River since Twain's time have affected human disasters such as the flooding of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and the human and natural disasters caused to the wetlands and coastlines in the Mississippi Delta by the BP Deepwater oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. One might otherwise pair Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* with a reading of Huck Finn as a way to highlight the remarkable recovery from near extinction of the American bald eagle as a result of the outcry that followed Carson's publication, which brought attention to the ill effects DDT and other chemical pesticides were having on avian populations reliant on major waterways for food. Alton, Illinois, on the Mississippi flyway—just north of the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers at Cairo, which Jim and Huck missed that fateful foggy night, sending them deep into the slave-holding South—hosts the largest winter population of American bald eagles outside of Alaska.

There is no shortage of examples in the literature we study by which we may read "from an ecological rather than a narrowly human-centered perspective" (Love 35). Along these lines, one might ask students to consider the evolutionary-biological viewpoints in Melville's *Moby Dick* from the por-

trayals of struggle Ishmael and Ahab engage with the whale and the ocean (Love 34–35). Or we might contemplate the deep ecological conflicts portrayed among animals (both human and nonhuman) and the natural world in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea.* Or, we might consider Willa Cather's "experimental stylistic techniques" in *The Professor's House,* which enhance "our sense of the rhetorical interlacing of cultural/aesthetic and biological elements in the narrative" (Love 11). We might take up the most "controversial and vexing issue of evolutionary theory and practice, as well as the center of political and moral discussion: the question of altruism versus selfishness in human nature and behavior" as depicted in the literature that we read (Love 11). More broadly we might ask students to consider the potential damaging effects of human behavior on the natural world and think about ways to become less anthropocentric and more "ecocentric"[1] in their attitudes and behaviors.

A view of the natural world. © 2008 JupiterImages/Photos.com.

Through reading green we might begin to invest our attentions toward the central insights of ecology—that everything is connected—and help students learn compelling motives for thinking beyond ourselves toward rebuilding our relationships with the planet.

"Nature" Writing or Environmental Literatures

Many of the adolescents we teach grow up devoid of experiences in open spaces and natural areas (Louv). Without experiences that celebrate a sense of place in developing our identities, we gain little sense of stewardship of our communities. Love of the natural world in which we all live should be encouraged in secondary education. Teachers can encourage this process through reading "nature" writing or environmental literatures in their classrooms. Such literatures, often filled with adventures and resonant of a writer's deep, passionate attachment to a particular place, can stimulate student interest in literacy achievement. However, teachers may not know where to begin.

Nature writing traditionally deals with individual meditation on one's environment, describing how identity is shaped through a mixture of sentient observation—sights, sounds, smells, and other tactile sensations (Day). Ecocritic Scott Slovik defines nature writing as "literary nonfiction that offers scientific scrutiny of the world (as in the older tradition of literary natural history), explores the private experience of the individual human observer of the world, or reflects upon the political and philosophical implications of the relationships among human beings and the larger planet" (888). According to the preeminent ecocritic Lawrence Buell, nature writing historically has focused on locales beyond urban areas. Contemporarily, many stress that nature writing can be practiced in urban locales as

Through reading green we might begin to invest our attentions toward the central insights of ecology—that everything is connected—and help students learn compelling motives for thinking beyond ourselves toward rebuilding our relationships with the planet.

well (Buell 144). The term *environmental literatures* more accurately encompasses the current hybridity that exemplifies the ecocritical literary movement today—involving "fusions of 'natural' and 'constructed' environments" (Buell viii).

The works of canonical authors such as Thoreau, Blake, Dickinson, and Emerson, among many others, fit in the broad category of Environmental literatures. Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold also come readily to mind. As teachers consider nature writing that speaks to students in urban areas, selections might come not only from well-known nature literature but also from "non-mainstream" wilderness writers, such as those by indigenous authors and authors of color (e.g., Linda Hogan, Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, Lucille Clifton, Langston Hughes, bell hooks, Maxine Hong Kingston, Jamaica Kincaid, Simon J. Ortiz, Pat Mora, Rudolfo Anaya, among many, many others), those from an urban/"non-wild" standpoint (e.g., Robert Michael Pyle, Van Jones, Michael Pollan, Lynda Mapes, among many others), and those written from a local perspective (essays, poems, environmental fiction written about the places you live and teach). Anderson, Slovik, and O'Grady, the editors of *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture,* state that an unprecedented "burgeoning number of humans have put pen to paper" in the last 50 years "to celebrate connections with plants and animals, to muse on the farmer's relationships to the land, to report travels to distant frontiers where wilderness can still be found, to lament the loss of places and species dear to them, to ponder the cultural and philosophical and economic roots of the worsening crisis, and to praise some little corner of the earth where daily life still maintains contact with what is good, wild, and healthy" (xxi). There are numerous collections of nature writing or environmental literature from which we might select excerpts to teach along with a whole world of writers whose longer works might captivate varied student interests. The titles of anthologies and critical editions are listed in the sidebar (see "Environmental Anthologies and Critical Collections") and offer resources for teachers that include a range of diverse writers both contemporary and historical across a stunning array of genres.

The narratives we select to teach demonstrate what we value. As high school English teacher Clark Meyer queries,

> I have some questions to ask of my profession. In my darker moments, I wonder why I teach my students the distinction between a tercet and a quatrain when they know nothing about tanagers and cardinals. Which kind of learning is more likely to help develop them into the kind of adults that will make our planet a more livable place? And the narratives that might help us at this point in our history, why are they not a part of the canon we typically share in school? In the early years of this new and uncertain century, what does it mean to be educated anymore? Should young people be more familiar with Chaucer and Harper Lee than Rachel Carson or Aldo Leopold? (9 Aug. 2008)

If we do not begin in our profession to teach narratives which make visible that we value making our planet a more livable place, we will continue to slip less and less graciously into environments like those in the science fictional world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (popularized by the film *Blade Runner*), for example, where we live encapsulated in gloomy artificial and virtual arenas. Is that really where we want to be heading?

Insights from Ecocomposition

Scholars engaged with ecocomposition work in rhetoric and composition studies and place ecological thinking and composition and rhetoric studies in dialogue with one another to consider the ecological properties of discourse and "the ways in which ecologies, environments, locations, places, and natures are discursively affected" (Weisser and Dobrin 2). Ecocomposition is a way of looking at literacy using concepts from ecology. It takes an ecological view of writing that extends beyond the sociocultural processes we usually think of when we teach writing to include aspects such as "nature" and "place." Its main point of reference, borrowed from an article by Sidney I. Dobrin, is "Writing Takes Place" (Weisser and Dobrin 11–26). Insights from ecocomposition help us to think about the ways in which discourse and environments constitute each other, the interrelated ways in which physical and constructed environments affect discursive production and interpretation. Sidney I.

Environmental Anthologies and Critical Collections

Adamson, Joni, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 2002. Print.

My university students love this collection because it identifies the challenges made by people of color to mainstream environmentalism. Environmental justice activists have linked social inequalities to the uneven distribution of environmental dangers and highlighted grassroots movements in poor communities and communities of color that aim to protect neighborhoods and worksites from environmental degradation and work to gain equal access to the natural resources that sustain their cultures. This collection approaches environmental justice issues from diverse geographical, ethnic, and disciplinary perspectives, always viewing environmental issues as integral to problems of social inequities and oppression. It brings together a collection of multifaceted work by leading scholars, activists, writers, teachers, and artists and is a useful resource for those teachers and students who realize that environmental issues of concern are particularly acute in poor communities and in communities of color and are mostly invisible to mainstream environmental writers.

Anderson, Lorraine, Scott Slovic, and John P. O'Grady, eds. *Literature and the Environment: A Reader on Nature and Culture*. New York: Longman, 1999. Print.

This collection explores humans' relationship to nature and the role literatures can play in shaping a cultural response to environmental realities. It includes early writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Mary Austin, along with contemporary writers such as Gary Snyder, Mary Oliver, bell hooks, Jamaica Kincaid, Peter Coyote, and Terry Tempest Williams. It is thematically organized in three parts—the human animal; inhabiting place; and economy and ecology—and includes an additional table of contents organized by genre.

Bryson, J. Scott, ed. *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 2002. Print.

This is a collection of critical essays that address the work of "ecopoets" such as Gary Snyder, Mary Oliver, W. S. Merwin, Linda Hogan, and Wendell Berry, among others, whose poems deal increasingly with environmental and ecological issues. It is a good critical resource for teachers looking for diverse poetry that engages environmental debate.

Coupe, Laurence, ed. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.

This volume, having been published first in the United Kingdom, is more worldly than many of the others and contains a fair representation of both British and American authors. This comprehensive work leans toward the critical more than the literary, although it includes both, and it covers the most important aspects of the intersections between ecology, culture, and literature in the expanding field of ecocriticism. It addresses Romantic ecology and its legacy; the earth, memory, and the critique of modernity; nature/culture/gender; ecocritical principles; environmental literary history; and the nature of text. Its unique selection of essays and excerpts is concerned not only with literary questions but also with the "crucial, troubled dialectic of nature and culture" (Gerrard, back matter). This is more a resource for critically minded teachers than something to be used with students.

Finch, Robert, and John Elder, eds. *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. New York: Norton, 2002. Print. See also Guignard, Lilace Mellin. *A Field Guide to* The Norton Book of Nature Writing. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.

Writers in this volume range from those born in 1720 to 1962. The selections are restricted to works of nonfiction written in English and include canonical American, Native American, African American, Asian American, British, Canadian, Australian, and Caribbean authors. The field guide provides apparatuses to help teachers and students think about and respond to readings in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, eds. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. Print.

This collection was the first of its kind. Its introduction is a venerable "must read" for anyone who wants to get started with green(ing) English. The critical selections in the volume are organized in three sections: (1) Ecotheory: Reflections on Nature and Culture; (2) Ecocritical Considerations of Fiction and Drama; and (3) Critical Studies of Environmental Literature. Its limitations, according to Buell, are that the early years of ecocritical investigations, as exemplified in this volume, focused too narrowly on "nature writing" as object of study. Nonetheless, it is a foundational volume and worth a read, although some might lose patience with the density of critical language.

Hart, George, and Scott Slovic. *Literature and the Environment*. Westport: Greenwood, 2004. Print.

This collection is an edited volume of essays written by ecocritical scholars, which is part of a series, "Exploring Social Issues through Literature." It introduces readers to eleven authors who are commonly

(continued)

Environmental Anthologies and Critical Collections *(continued)*

recognized as major figures in American environmental or "nature" literature and who are well known for exploring social and environmental issues in their literary work: Mary Austin, Loren Eiseley, Rachel Carson, Wallace Stegner, Denise Levertov, Edward Abbey, Ursula K. Le Guin, Gary Snyder, Barry Lopez, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Terry Tempest Williams.

McKibben, Bill, ed. *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau.* Foreword by Al Gore. New York: Literary Classics, 2008. Print.

Bill McKibben, an environmentalist rather than a literary scholar, surveys the literature of American environmentalism and organizes it around "the movement," which he says has been "so often driven by a piece of writing" (xxi). The volume is arranged chronologically beginning with Thoreau and proposes "to give some sense of how environmental concern built to a great crest at Earth Day in 1970 and since has begun to explore new directions" and includes nonfiction, poetry and some "tiny chunks" of fiction (xxx). McKibben allows that the volume, though a grand collaboration, reflects his particular take on this literature, this movement, and this moment in time offered in the hope that "they will spur not only reflection but action as well" (xxxi). This volume contains many writers and excerpts that most of the others do not and in that is more eclectic, fresh, and interdisciplinary.

***Rethinking Schools.* "Teaching for Environmental Justice." 23.4 (Summer 2009).**

This special issue contains many practical teaching ideas for addressing issues related to environmental justice in high school and middle school.

Slovic, Scott H., and Terrell F. Dixon, eds. *Being in the World: An Environmental Reader for Writers.* New York: Macmillan, 1993. Print.

This collection is designed to introduce writing teachers and students to many examples of the best American nature writing since Thoreau. It includes almost exclusively nonfiction essays, letters and journals, and short works of fiction. Unlike most, it is not organized chronologically and offers more ethnic and gender diversity and writing styles among contributors along with a useful teaching apparatus. It is divided into four parts: (1) Nature: "Out There"; (2) Human Visitors; (3) Belonging to the World and Abstractions; (4) Thinking about the Environment. The intent is to provide useful models and stimuli for writers and contains numerous writing assignments for getting started.

Dobrin and Christian R. Weisser define ecocompositon as "the study of the relationships between environments (and by that we mean natural, constructed, and even imagined places) and discourse (speaking, writing, and thinking) . . . ecocomposition attempts to provide a more holistic, encompassing framework for studies of the relationship between discourse and environment" (6). Ecocomposition asks, What effects does a place have (or different places have) on writing processes? In what ways is our identity influenced by places, and what bearing does this have on our writing? What sets of relationships help us define our place(s)—including, but not limited to, relationships between writers and readers? How might the sometimes contradictory sets of relationships in which we write allow us to see certain possibilities and foreclose others? How might these relationships define reality for each of us in different ways? ("Ecocomposition").

Derek Owens, author of many works on composition and sustainability, offers some ways to include insights from ecocomposition scholarship and thinking into writing activities that we might ask our students to engage in ("Teaching"). For example, he asks students to develop a "neighborhood portfolio" from some of the following activities: construct a place portrait; research photo essays of your home neighborhoods and document the status of your homes; write oral histories of family members or neighbors, "the older the better"; fashion portraits of cultures or subcultures to which you belong or to which you have access; write commentaries on your work environments or where your parents work, documenting the conditions of those environments, weighing in on what makes them desirable or miserable; assemble critiques of your educational histories; put together plans for better neighborhoods, "'eutopias' (*good* places, as opposed to the idealized perfection of utopia)"; develop a future portrait of how you see the world in several decades (368).

Owens couples the writing he expects students to accomplish with an array of readings that address,

directly and indirectly, matters of preservation, risk, and environmental crises all circulating around the metaphor of sustainability, which he defines in *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation* as "an intergenerational concept that means adjusting our current behavior so that it causes the least amount of harm to future generations," including concern with intragenerational equity; understanding the links between poverty and ecosystem decline; recognizing short- and long-term environmental, social, psychological, and economic impact of conspicuous consumption; making conservation and preservation inevitable effects of our daily lifestyles; forsaking a great many of the trappings of consumerist culture to live more simply, thereby diminishing the impact of our ecological footprints; and looking critically at our contemporary behaviors from the perspective of children living generations hence, and modifying those behaviors accordingly (xi). Owens states, "What I am doing is struggling to fashion a temporary environment where students, through written (and visual) expression and research, might give voice to matters I consider to be of utmost importance to them (and me): the welfare and survival of their local communities, families, aspirations, and future generations" ("Teaching" 368). Others concerned with ecocomposition have engaged students in activities such as, "What is your ecological address? How might you locate the place you live by understanding how water flows through it, how it is used, what other life forms are supported by it and are/were there because of the waters that flow through your habitat?" (Hass). Teachers might also adapt the familiar George Ella Lyon poem "Where I'm From" to investigate native plant and animal names or geological, watershed, and biome features of the places they are from (see Christensen). Many such bioregional and sustainability activities are likewise invoked in place-based education, which I describe in the next section.

Place-Based Reading and Writing, Including Indigenous Literatures

Place-based education uses the concept of "place" or "environment" as an integrating context across disciplines (Sobel). It is characterized by interdisciplinary learning, team-teaching, hands-on experiences that center on problem-solving projects, learner-centered education that adapts to students' individual skills and abilities, and the exploration of the local community and natural surroundings. Laurie Lane-Zucker defines place-based education as

> the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place. . . . Place-based education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become part of the community rather than a passive observer of it. (ii–iii)

Place-based education is not simply a way to integrate the curriculum around a study of place, however, but a way to inspire stewardship, love for home place whether urban or rural, and an authentic renewal and revitalization of civic responsibility that brings education back to the neighborhood (Sobel).

Place-based education is needed so that "the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit" (Gruenewald 4). The work engaged in place-based education is an embrace of human experience in connection to the experiences of both human and nonhuman others and the natural world with a mindset toward conservation and restoration of our shared environments for future generations (Gruenewald 6). Place-based education works to create experiences where students can build relationships of care for places close to home, wherever that may be (Sobel). As teacher-educator Gregory A. Smith asserts, "The primary value of place-based education lies in the way that it serves to strengthen students' connections to others and to the regions in which they live" (593–94). Place-based education is flourishing in many rural areas; however, it has broad applicability to urban areas as well (Day; Sobel; Stone and Barlow).

I offer four primary ways we might implement place-based education in the English curriculum. One way is to consider the place-value of

ideas provided for reading nature writing and environmental literatures offered in the previous section or by teaching regional literatures as a way of illuminating the particularities of one's home place (see, for example, Smyth and Hansen). Another way is to engage in writing projects centered in local inquiry, such as those immortalized by Eliot Wigginton in his southern Appalachia oral history projects and *Foxfire* series[2] (see also Brooke; Umphrey) or by conducting place-based writing marathons such as those popularized by Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project Director Richard Louth (see Louth). Yet another way is to engage students in activities that lead students to do some nature writing of their own; an excellent resource I use to inspire "nature writing" with my students is *Into the Field: A Guide to Locally-Focused Teaching* (Leslie, Tallmadge, and Wessels), which outlines activities for close observational writing and eco-journal keeping, among others. Yet another approach is to study local indigenous literatures and to conduct place-based writing marathons to locales of indigenous significance in your area (see Epstein). As several ecocritics have pointed out extensively, much can be learned about living well in a place from studying some of the Native American writers writing today and in the past; selections from many indigenous writers are included in the anthologies annotated in the sidebar. In addition, an excellent explication of a place-based project that focuses on study of indigenous narratives was conducted by tribal elders and English students in the Pacific Northwest (see Scheuerman, Gritter, Schuster, and Fisher).

To begin, consider the five approaches to place-based learning described by Smith that might help transform place-based curriculum development in the English language arts into place-based practices: (1) incorporate local cultural studies; (2) investigate local nature studies; (3) investigate, address, and solve authentic community problems; (4) shape local internships and entrepreneurial opportunities that help students find value and economic opportunities in home communities; and (5) get involved in community decision making (587–93).

Place-based education can take many forms. However, as Smith points out, there are several principles of good instruction that commonly apply:

- "[T]eachers and students turn to phenomena immediately around them as a foundation for curriculum development" (593).
- Place-based education emphasizes learning experiences that allow students to become creators of knowledge rather than consumers of knowledge created by others.
- "[S]tudents' questions and concerns play a central role in what is studied" (593).
- Teachers act as experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities.
- The wall between school and community is more permeable and crossed with more frequency—community members can play a more active role in the classroom and students can play a more active role in the community (593).

Clearly, place-based approaches mean significant shifts from business as usual in the English language arts classroom. Teachers must take an active role in creating the curriculum, not just dispensing curriculum created by others. We must be willing to take risks and embrace ambiguity. We must see students for their potential as participatory citizens who can make a difference in the communities in which we all live.

Environmental Justice Movements

Environmental justice movements have grown around the world from a confluence of civil rights concerns, antiwar and antinuclear campaigns, women's rights movements, and grassroots organizing around issues of environmental concern (Adamson, Evans, and Stein). Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, the editors of *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics and Pedagogy,* define environmental justice as "the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment" and define the environment as "the places in which we live, work, play, and worship" (4). Efforts to promote environmental justice are specifically concerned with addressing the disproportionate incidence of toxification and environmental contamination in communities of the poor and/or communities of color. Grassroots environmental justice activists aim "to secure for those

affected the right to live unthreatened by the risks posed by environmental degradation and contamination and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture" (4). Environmental justice movements around the world call attention to the ways that the disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to corollary social upheaval and the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity. Such groups have pushed mainstream environmental movements to become more aware of issues related to race, class, and gender, among others, and opened social justice movements to consider the significance of ecological integrity to a community's well-being (5). In 1991 at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington DC, participants put forth a multi-point statement, which is widely circulated and available for use in the classroom, that focuses on environmental concerns as a matter of social justice and community organizing and that has been largely integrated into scholarly and activist thinking in ecocriticism and ecocomposition (Buell 114–21; Dobrin and Weisser 5). These points might offer useful topics for inquiry in classroom and community projects such as those advocated by Jessica Singer in *Stirring Up Justice: Writing and Reading to Change the World.*

A strong thread within the environmental justice movement is the use of expressive arts "to transform toxic landscapes, to voice community experiences of environmental racism, and to imaginatively convey the issues at stake in environmental justice struggles" (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 9). Community-based art and writing projects that might be taken up through interdisciplinary collaborations include production of environmental art and poetry in community-based settings. Environmental art is "situated in urban spaces and produced by marginalized communities, [and] challenges the boundaries and hierarchies traditionally defining the culture as represented by those in power" (Di Chiro 284–85). Students might be asked to respond visually and verbally to questions such as, What counts as "green"? Where is the "environment" located? What are we trying to "sustain" and for whom? Artistic images that are used to transform a community landscape from "an industrial waste zone" to a thing of beauty and meditation helps students to challenge "the paralyzing stereotypes of inner-city dwellers as, at best, unconcerned and unproductive, and, at worst, menacing and destructive" (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 11). By linking art, poetry, and "greening," students demonstrate how the process enables them to see through "artist's eyes" to transform their environment, and in the words of one young boy, as Giovanna Di Chiro reports, "brings what's beautiful inside, out for everyone to see" (285).

War as an Environmental Concern

One of the worst causes of environmental degradation is war. War results in horrid toxification and destruction of landscapes and natural resources, in addition to the toll it takes on the lives of humans and other living things. In the age of nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare, its toxic effects are far-reaching. We are all downwinders. We all live downstream.

Teachers might explore fiction and literature of war for the devastating effects wars have had on the environment. Also, students could be encouraged to explore current wars for their effects on local citizens and communities and the long-lasting environmental and humanitarian effects of war and weapons proliferation. Teachers might also look to the many excellent classroom ideas presented for promoting peace in Virginia Monseau's *A Curriculum of Peace: Selected Essays from* English Journal, Mary Rose O'Reilley's *The Peaceable Classroom,* Riane Tennenhaus Eisler and Ron Miller's *Education for a Culture of Peace,* and Chris Weber's *Nurturing the Peacemakers in Our Students: A Guide to Writing and Speaking Out about Issues of War and Peace,* among many others for learning antidotes to cultures of violence and war.

The ultimate question we must ask in green(ing) English, in attempting to save the world, is, "How might we live peacefully and humanely with each other, with the whole of life?" It is, at its root, a question that is answered, I think, by learning to love. How do we cultivate with students a sense of love for all of life that begins in our local communities, on our home ground, but which also might extend beyond national boundaries to embrace the whole of that lovely planet upon which we live?

To answer that question, I draw from Kathleen Dean Moore, director of the Spring Creek

Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word at Oregon State University, who writes that

> To love—a person and a place—means at least this: 1) To want to be near it, physically. 2) To want to know everything about it—its story, its moods, what it looks like by moonlight. 3) To rejoice in the fact of it. 4) To fear its loss, and grieve for its injuries. 5) To protect it—fiercely, mindlessly, futilely, and maybe tragically, but to be helpless to do otherwise. 6) To be transformed in its presence—lifted, lighter on your feet, transparent, open to everything beautiful and new. 7) To want to be joined with it, taken in by it, lost in it. 8) To want the best for it. 9) Desperately. (qtd. in Pelo 32)

Ann Pelo offers these principles as a means to cultivate such a love for place and humanity with our students: "Walk the land, learn the names, embrace sensuality, explore new perspectives, learn the stories, tell the stories" (32). These are the foundational concerns of English teaching in its broadest sense.

Embracing Environment

Ours is the only welcoming planet in our solar system—contained upon it is everything that is dear to us, "all human drama and comedy. That's where life is; that's where all the good stuff is (Acton, qtd. in Glotfelty xxv). Let our concerted efforts to green English amount to more than "lone voices howling in the wilderness" (Glotfelty xvii). Let us establish an embrace of environmental and human peace as a permanent concern of English teaching to help instill in our students and ourselves a sense of concern about the fate of the earth, for each other, and for all the other species with whom we share this lovely watery planet. Let us embrace our responsibility to act on that awareness and to use the power we have to imagine change and spread the love through our passions for words, poems, and stories that might make a difference. EJ

Notes

1. "Ecocentric" is an attitude that posits a "world that is an intrinsically dynamic, interconnected web of relations with no absolute dividing lines between the living and nonliving, animate and the inanimate" (Eckersley, qtd. in Buell 137).

2. Eliot Wigginton (born Brooks Eliot Wigginton on November 9, 1942) is an American oral historian, folklorist, writer and former educator. He is most widely known for his *Foxfire* books series, twelve volumes in all, consisting of field reports by high school students from Rabun County, Georgia.

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Lessons

Emerson told me to look to nature
to learn how to live.
sometimes I am too busy to listen.

the deer gather in my backyard,
three, four, five at a time
they are still and lovely;

I forget their lessons daily.

Thoreau told me the water
would share its wisdom
if only I would watch it for a while.

fish just keep swimming
and eat and breathe
without thought or care;

I over-analyze it all.

Whitman told me to look inward
to know who and what I am
and to let it change often;

contradictions are beauty,
he said, and we are full
of multitudes and truth.

—Heather Statz

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What Literature Related to the Environment and Nature Do You Enjoy Teaching?

Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

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In *Cat's Cradle,* Kurt Vonnegut introduces readers to *ice-nine*—a crystallization of water that melts at 114.4° Fahrenheit—the creation of scientist Felix Hoenikker at the behest of the U.S. Marines, who have grown weary after years of slogging through mud. Jonah, the novel's protagonist, recognizes the shortcomings of ice-nine, chiefly, its ability to freeze the entire world, and challenges the "pure research" conducted by scientists like Hoenikker. Vonnegut's humorous, thoughtful commentary on science, advancing technologies, and the afterthoughts of their environmental and human impact makes *Cat's Cradle* the literary text related to the environment and nature that I most enjoy teaching.

Among the many targets of Vonnegut's signature acerbic wit, careless science's impact on humankind and the natural world is broached throughout. I typically prompt students to consider the methods Vonnegut employs to make his case, including popular satiric techniques such as exaggeration, parody, incongruity, and reversal. Students commonly recognize satiric techniques at work in the exaggerated apocalyptic fate of a world contaminated with ice-nine, the parody of an ill-informed general public embodied in the character of Miss Francine Pefko and the unwitting Girl Pool, the incongruity of banners that read "Peace on Earth!" and "Good Will Toward Men!" hanging in a laboratory where weapons of destruction are made, and countless other examples throughout the novel.

While literature authored by the likes of Henry David Thoreau, Ernest Hemingway, and Gary Paulsen has a way of capturing the beauty of the natural world, I embrace *Cat's Cradle* above all others for the way Vonnegut uses black humor to prod readers to think critically about the human potential for destroying the natural environment and all of humanity through acts of sheer negligence. Though at times bleak, Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* is sure to have an indelible impact on your students.

Aldo Leopold's "Thinking Like a Mountain"

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Wolves in the Upper Great Lakes Region have been on and off the federal endangered species list multiple times in the last three years. When they're on the list, as they are now, farmers can't shoot a wolf that is killing cattle or, for that matter, the family poodle. The students in my central Wisconsin English class, most of whom are avid deer hunters, view the wolf as a personal rival.

They can relate to Aldo Leopold who, in his classic essay "Thinking Like a Mountain," describes himself as a "trigger-happy" youth who once killed a family of wolves, including a mother's pups, hoping to leave himself more deer to hunt. My students

can feel Leopold's disregard for the wolf in their bones; they know the adrenaline rush of killing a deer, which killing a wolf seems to preserve.

But they also can't deny Leopold's logic. They are well-versed in food chains and ecosystems and the connected nature of everything on earth. They understand that extirpating wolves means the deer population will rise only temporarily. Because the vegetation on the mountain will be over-browsed, the mountain, through erosion, will die. Then, without food, the deer population will plummet.

Aldo Leopold's essay always results in a class that is at once effortless and fully charged. The essay is short. Students "get" it. They believe in its general theme but have trouble conceding to its specifics. Reading the essay always incites a debate. Some think wolves should remain on the endangered species list. Others think we should not only delist them but also have a wolf hunt. It's the same debate their parents and Department of Natural Resources officials are involved in with the federal government. My students wonder, unprompted, about the significance of the green fire that Leopold observed in the dying wolf's eyes. What was it? What could it represent? When the bell rings, even though our debate is never resolved, I believe I can see in the students' faces that same green fire—but it is very much alive.

Interdisciplinary Inroads

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My students just don't seem to fall in love with Thoreau the way I once did. They claim the language is dense, the pace slow. Each year I fight back for my favorite transcendentalist, arguing that his views were meant as leaven for an increasingly urban society, not a manual for living. We have good discussions, experiment with the creation of an imaginary "Walden Village" based on Thoreau's ideas, and debate the modern relevance of his most quoted words.

But after years of packaging Thoreau, I've decided to create an interdisciplinary elective on the environment in modern culture. Environmentalism is suddenly exploding into so many different media outlets, many of which call to students more clearly than Thoreau. After some enjoyable research, I've come up with varied resources in several categories, which could mix and match in any unit on environmental literature.

Fiction:

- *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *Fire on the Mountain* by Edward Abbey
- *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein (a children's book)
- *The Island* by Gary Paulsen

Nonfiction:

- *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver
- *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan

Films and TV:

- *Avatar*
- *Wall-E*
- *An Inconvenient Truth*
- *Princess Mononoke*
- *Big Ideas for a Small Planet* (TV series from the Sundance Channel, available on iTunes for $2 per episode)

On the Web:

- *Orion Magazine* (http://www.orionmagazine.org/)
- *The Story of Stuff* (http://www.storyofstuff.com/)
- Andy Goldsworthy (Artist) Online Showcase (http://www.rwc.uc.edu/artcomm/web/w2005_2006/maria_Goldsworthy/TEST/index.html)

Perhaps next time I teach Thoreau in my Honors American Literature course, I'll kick off the unit with *The Giving Tree,* take a computer lab day to admire Goldsworthy's art online and design a natural art exhibition on the quad, and, after watching *Avatar,* assign students a film review paper connecting *Avatar* with Thoreau's ideas in at least three ways. Or maybe I'll get crazy and replace Thoreau with Kingsolver, his contemporary descendant.

Student Voice: How Has English Class Helped You Better Understand, Appreciate, and Protect Nature?

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This semester, I began an independent study project under the guidance of my advisor and teacher Lori Molodow. I read three books, each by a different Brontë sister, and then compared and contrasted their styles and studied how their lives influenced what they wrote. I was not planning on getting a lesson on conservation.

When I cracked open *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë (Signet, 1982), I was immediately swept up in the scenic descriptions. When Lowood was described, Brontë said that "It became all green, all flowery; its great elm, ash, and oak skeletons were restored to majestic life; woodland plants sprang up profusely in its recesses; unnumbered varieties of moss filled its hollows, and it made a strange ground-sunshine out of the wealth of its wild primrose plants" (78–79). I envisioned myself walking in that wood, smelling the flowers' perfume, and feeling the plants' softness beneath my feet. As a reader, I could not help but appreciate nature.

Brontë's descriptions immortalize "the wreathed and dewy orchard trees" and "hedge and wood, full-leaved and deeply tinted" that "contrasted well with the sunny hue of the clear meadows between" (249). Those images endure because Brontë preserved them with her words. However, her descriptions can do more. The luscious pictures conjured in my head do not leave me content with only images; they make me want to see the actual sights. To do that, we have to conserve nature in more than words. People need to preserve nature in reality.

Now I always make the effort to throw my soda cans in the recycling bin. I try to shorten my showers to conserve water. I carpool whenever I can. Even little actions can help to conserve the environment and ensure that the scenery described by Brontë lives on in more than just her pages.

Thompson-McClellan Photography

Michelle Jewett

Between Dreams and Beasts: Four Precepts for Green English Teaching

A teacher describes principles and teaching suggestions for engaging students in substantial interdisciplinary and nondisciplinary environmental inquiry.

Dreams and beasts are two keys by which we are to find out the secrets of our nature . . . they are our test objects.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

After a typically brutal semester student teaching, I landed my first job teaching ninth-grade English. It was 1997 and the current wave of environmentalism was just beginning. The school's annual Earth Day door-decorating contest was in its fourth year, and the winning class was promised a pizza and ice cream party.[1] I picked a crew of students to canvas the campus for trash. In an hour, using only markers, butcher paper, and whatever detritus they'd scavenged from bins and hallways, my students proceeded to create a nature scene out of found objects, candy wrappers, chip bags, and soda cans. It included sky and sun, an ocean and a park, trees, people, a ship, a dog, all spoiled by litter. At the top of the door they wrote, "Don't trash the planet."

That Friday the winners were read during daily announcements and my class won. Beaming, I entered the teacher workroom later that day to a chilly response. I sat down at a crowded table across from the German teacher. Suddenly she spat, "I can't believe this. I should've won!" Then she grabbed her string cheese and spun out the door. I searched the others, bewildered. "Don't worry," one teacher laughed, "she's just mad because every year she goes all out decorating her door and her class always wins." Later that day I learned from my students that the German teacher's door decorations were legendary: over-the-top smoke machines, strobe lights, music, and lots of expense. The following week, however, as if the announcement had never been made, our win was overturned and the pizza and ice cream party quietly went to the German teacher's class instead.

I tell this story not because I'm bitter (although I was more outraged than my students) but because it is emblematic of how the term *green* has come to be used. On the one hand, surface over substance and marketing over material; on the other, a deeply political and potentially divisive issue.[2]

Green Déjà vu

Increasingly, one gauge of disaffection between generations in this country is the guilt youngsters assign oldsters for having so ravaged the environment, and the older generation's disdain of such a simplistic assignation. Healing and preserving our wounded environment has become a tragically factionalized political issue.

—*Gerald Haslam, "Who Speaks for the Earth?"*

In a related article also published in *EJ* in the early 1970s, Illinois high school teacher Carolyn M. Peterson asks, "What is the role of the English teacher in the environment crisis?" (120). Peterson had just finished team-teaching an environment

course (to be cancelled the following year) with colleagues in social studies, art, and biology. In response to this query, Peterson posits seven principles as necessary today as when prescribed over 35 years ago: (1) "*Face the fact that there is an environmental crisis*"; (2) "*Use the tools that we demand of students: read, question, analyze, and act*"; (3) "*List important concepts, as a result of your study of the environmental problems and with the help of experts*" (e.g., the planet has limited resources); (4) "*Clarify the goals of English and education*"; (5) "*Match and select your methods and materials to your educational goals*"; (6) "*Make the material relevant*"; (7) "Apply ecological concepts in teaching English" (121–23; italics in original).

While most of these principles apply to curriculum in general, Peterson elaborates on each in an environmental context, providing readers with unit themes, lesson ideas, discussion questions, concepts, goals, and a plethora of useful (if now dated) texts. Throughout she argues for environmental education as a "way of life," stating, "it is essential to develop environmentally literate citizens who will be able to make decisions and choices as producers, consumers, voters, and recreationalists. We must realize that this is not the responsibility of the biological and physical scientists alone. It is interdisciplinary and involves all areas of knowledge" (121).

Remapping the Disciplines

In *The Interdisciplinary Teacher's Handbook: Integrated Teaching across the Curriculum,* Stephen Tchudi and Stephen Lafer are emphatic in their belief that integrating disciplines has the most promise of any movement to revolutionize education (vii). Examining common definitions of the term *discipline,* Tchudi and Lafer point to notions of control, order, and obedience (5). They conclude that despite its past usefulness as a way to storehouse and refine knowledge, the disciplinary lens has become a blinder, the map too often mistaken for the territory (7). And according to key environmentalist scientists such as David Orr, "the greatest ecological issues of our time have to do in one way or another with our failure to see things in their entirety" (qtd. in Owens 139).

Criticism of disciplinary specialization and its potential lack of context and relevance are not new, particularly in higher education. Professor Mary Savage coins it "academentia" (qtd. in Owens 136) and writer naturalist Wendell Berry defines it as "the disease of modern culture"(qtd. in Owens 134). Berry continues, "the specialist system fails from a personal point of view because a person who can do only one thing can do virtually nothing for himself" (qtd. in Owens 135). However, in the past few decades amalgamated or hybrid fields such as geo-engineering and ethno-history have begun to flourish and, not surprisingly, as Margaret Miller and Anne-Marie McCartan point out, "the most advanced research in these fields is occurring at the crossings between them" (qtd. in Tchudi and Lafer 8).

I introduce a key concept from ecology known as the "edge effect." Where do the birds gather in a backyard? On the edge. Where does the fisherman or fisherwoman cast a lure? At the shoreline. If you want to boost biodiversity, boost edge. Examples of edge in education might be community/school, curriculum/teacher, student/teacher, student/peers, and discipline/discipline.

The Edge Effect

Returning to Peterson's question, "What is the English teacher's role in the environmental crisis?" I introduce a key concept from ecology known as the "edge effect." Where do the birds gather in a backyard? On the edge. Where does the fisherman or fisherwoman cast a lure? At the shoreline. If you want to boost biodiversity, boost edge. In gardening, examples of edge might be house/yard, pavement/soil, fence/yard, plant/soil, plant/air, and water/soil. By extension, examples of edge in education might be community/school, curriculum/teacher, student/teacher, student/peers, and discipline/discipline.

> Edges are where things happen. Where a forest meets the prairie, where a river flows into the sea or at nearly any other boundary between two ecosystems is a cauldron of biodiversity. All the species that thrive in each of the two environments are present, plus new species that live in the transition zone between the two. The edge is richer than what is on either side. . . . The decision to

> increase or decrease edge depends on what lies on either side of the edge, and what we want from it. Edges allow us to define spaces, break them up into manageable areas, and work with them. They are places of transition and translation, where matter and energy flow or stop, or often change into something else. (Hemenway 52–53)

The edge effect is an ideal metaphor. Take Peterson's call for interdisciplinary teaching and imagine it as a place where the two fertile edges of science and humanities meet and potentially thrive. Or take the green movement of the 1970s and the greens of today: not "tree hugger" idealism, nor commercial opportunism, but transformed into something else. The notion that the edge can be molded depending on diversity and thoughtful design is analogous as well. With foresight, the two may respond to and use one another to become stronger, perhaps giving birth to something healthier from that process.

Nondisciplinary Spaces

It is important to stress that within the extended metaphor of the edge effect one ecosystem or discipline does not co-opt another and the interdisciplinary space where the two edges meet is not a substitute for either side. In fact, to effectively explore and understand places of integration, one must first grasp key knowledge in each of the disciplines. As a way to maintain disciplinary knowledge yet address this need for authentic integration, Peter Elbow proposes what he calls a nondisciplinary course. He explains that this would be a supplement, not replacement, for the disciplines where "a single concrete particular is seen from the point of view of the widest range of conflicting models, metaphors, hypothesis, conceptual schemes, sets, and disciplines" (9). Elbow suggests such a course would focus on loaded and current events, objects or people, though adds that these events don't have to be real as long as the criteria for choosing them is that both students and teacher find them to be of genuine importance (10).

In this light, I would like Green English to be formulated and considered interdisciplinary in that it combines science and English (and social studies and art and philosophy and ethics) and nondisciplinary in that it draws on yet doesn't replace learning in the individual fields. Furthermore, Green English can be viewed as nondisciplinary in that it approaches particular environmental concepts and issues from diverse and conflicting points of view, increasing "real learning." Elbow defines real learning as personal, social, and political and adds that it is most often associated with noncurricular, nonacademic activity (8). Additionally, real learning has two ingredients that are inherent in nondisciplinary teaching: the ability to recognize and apply new concepts in the widest range of situations and sources (14).

I propose Green English be thought of as a nondisciplinary approach located in the edge between disciplines, one that offers teachers and students opportunities for personal, social, political, and conceptual learning. This requires a wide-angled lens, or what Derek Owens likens to the compound eye of a bee where "multiple, simultaneous focusing is in order" (140). This is also reminiscent of Robert Scholes's call to reconstruct English via "a canon of concepts, precepts, and practices rather than a canon of texts" (qtd. in Owens 131). For, just as diversity increases survival in nature, getting students to "read, interpret, and criticize texts in a wide range of modes, genres and media" allows them to "develop better intellectual equipment for the lives they are actually living and will continue to live" (Scholes, qtd. in Owens 130).

Green English 101

I loosely group my Green English instruction into four themes, or precepts, which I offer here as starting points for teachers interested in integrating environmental literacy into their classrooms.

Precept #1: Go Outside

The first time I took a class outdoors I was teaching eighth-grade Humanities on a block schedule. My teaching partner, Michael, taught Math/Science to the same group of students. This was a K–8 school located in a heavily industrialized section of Long Beach near the Port of Los Angeles; the edge of our playground faced the semi-truck laden 710 freeway and, beyond that, a refinery expelled gray clouds into the sky. But Michael, an environmental science major, knew where to find nature on our campus and proposed we team up and take students on a

walking tour. In preparation, I conducted minilessons on descriptive writing and sensory details using Ralph Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You* and Michael taught lessons on plant life and the cycle of oxygen and carbon. He also showed students examples of nature diaries and, on the day of our walk, I gave students art supplies and they created small books to record their observations.

It was a large group of about 60 students. We discussed leaves on bushes near the faculty parking lot and touched trees near the kindergarten wing. After walking and sharing we sat on a small island of grass surrounded by fresh blacktop, took out our notebooks, and after a few prompts, we all wrote in silence. This is one of my favorite teaching memories. Taking those eighth graders outside was like magic. Since then I've taken other groups of students outside to write, to talk, to observe, to read, and to shoot films. I've gone outside with suburban eleventh graders and rural ninth graders, struggling middle school readers and second graders in a summer writing camp, and I've gone outside with detailed lesson plans and I've gone outside cold, without any sort of plan at all. Don't let fire drills and walks to and from the library be the only time you see sunlight with your students. Even a small dose of Dewey's experiential education can make a big impression.

Early in his career my husband was teaching a particularly rough group of fourth graders. One day, frustrated by off-task behavior and poor listening, he invented a pretense of a nature walk simply to get out of the classroom. He took them to an empty lot adjacent to the school and, much to his surprise, the students were focused, curious, excited, and they listened! Returning to the classroom, students brought back rocks and leaves and couldn't stop talking about what they did and saw. He concluded it was the best day of teaching he'd had all year. The abandoned lot was not new, of course. It had been there all along. And yet, by taking the children there, it was reframed as valuable and educative and the students responded with the kind of engagement and energy usually reserved for nonschool activities. This resulted in a unit on local flora as well as an infusion of nature-based classroom décor brought in by students throughout the year for investigation, touching, and viewing.

Being outside together seems to allow us to see each other differently, not as the role of teacher or student but as a more complete human. This makes all of us more vulnerable and it requires a deeper level of trust, too. The usual classroom structures and controlled environment are not there to fall back on; no campus security, no teacher next door. But, it also requires something else: a more holistic perspective of our relationship with one another and with what we are learning.

Precept #2: Bring Outside In

In 1999 Howard Gardner added an eighth intelligence, Naturalist, to his 1983 theory of Multiple Intelligences and defined it as "the human ability to discriminate among living things (plants, animals) as well as sensitivity to other features of the natural world (clouds, rock configurations)" (qtd. in Checkley 9). He added, "I also speculate that much of our consumer society exploits the naturalist intelligences, which can be mobilized in the discrimination among cars, sneakers, kinds of makeup and the like" (qtd. in Checkley 9). Thus, you don't have to take students outside to integrate Green English; there are many ways to bring the outside in.

One of our first journal assignments was to "listen to it grow dark." Suburban window open, I remember sitting on my bed from dusk to dark, listening intently. I expected nothing to happen and couldn't have been more wrong.

Growing up in Southern California, I had the good fortune to enroll in a high school Creative Writing class. One of our first journal assignments was to "listen to it grow dark." Suburban window open, I remember sitting on my bed from dusk to dark, listening intently. I expected nothing to happen and couldn't have been more wrong. Everything was happening! I wrote and wrote and wrote. Dogs, doors, kids, cars, even the sky seemed to turn up the volume before its final hush on nightfall. The next day I found my peers had similar epiphanies. This prompt seems so simple and yet it was so powerful that I never forgot it. In fact, I have since used it with my students and it never fails to warrant the same initial skepticism and ultimate pleasure. Listening to it grow dark asks us to slow

down, to pay attention; this relatively minimalist task recognizes our inner naturalist, oftentimes yielding a profound shift in perspective.

Inviting nature into your classroom in any form, literally or conceptually, can alter student perspective in similar ways. I've brought in rocks or flowers or a piece of fruit to use as a starting point for writing (this works well with poetry, such as the Odes of Pablo Neruda). I've also incorporated an arts-integrated approach by using suggestions from Fran Claggett and Joan Brown's *Drawing Your Own Conclusions: Graphic Strategies for Reading, Writing and Thinking.*

One great idea from Claggett and Brown is the Sun/Shadow Mandala, which I like to use at the beginning of the year. Students determine symbols for external or "happy" (sun) and internal or "sad" (shadow) aspects of themselves using the following concepts: animal, plant, color, number, shape, gem/mineral, and element. For example, "When you feel happy, what animal (plant, color, etc.) would you be and why?" Students identify corresponding adjectives to draw or collage their personal mandala. (See Figures 1 and 2.) There are many ways this assignment can be altered (such as literary character mandalas) and many different types of writing that can come from it. However, I've found that this type of nature-based metaphorical thinking brings the outside in and has inspired some of the most innovative work I've received from students.

I've also brought the outside in through large interdisciplinary projects using local environmental and social justice issues. In Albuquerque, this has involved investigating local topics such as New Mexico

FIGURE 1. Mandala Chart and Mandala by Steven Henley, Based on the Ideas of Elias Henley (adapted from Claggett and Brown)

	SUN SIGN	ADJECTIVE	SHADOW SIGN	ADJECTIVE
Animal	Kitten	Talkative	Ant	Silent
Plant	Rabbit Bush	Grows upward	Carrot	Grows downward
Color	White	Open ideas	Black	No ideas
Number	10	Even	–1	Backward
Shape	Decagon	Complex	Circle	Simple
Gem or Mineral	Silver	Constructive	Talc	Weak
Element	Lightning (fire)	Powerful	Lava (fire)	Temperamental

FIGURE 2. Mandala Chart and Mandala by Michelle Ann Jewett (adapted from Claggett and Brown)

	SUN SIGN	ADJECTIVE	SHADOW SIGN	ADJECTIVE
Animal	Leopard	Social	Cicada	Annoying
Plant	Vine	Persistent	Tulip	Rigid
Color	Blue	Patient	Red	Irritable
Number	Clock (1–12)	Productive	2	Binary thinking
Shape	Question mark	Curious	Exclamation point	Pushy
Gem or Mineral	Gold	Malleable	Ruby	Fake
Element	Fire	Focused	Water	Wishy-washy

land grants (i.e., land and water rights issues stemming from Spanish and Mexican grants made to Hispanic and Native American New Mexicans), the Rio Grande River, Navaho Code Talkers, the Manhattan Project and Trinity site, the Pueblo Revolt, Bureau of Indian Affairs government schools, and so on. These projects involve research, interviews with affiliated community members, and "going public" in the form of short documentary films or other digital media presentations. This year a student completed a documentary on the local effects of climate change. She interviewed an environmental scientist from the University of New Mexico, and we worked with her Earth Science teacher to ensure she got the content right. Another student made a film about the Navaho Long Walk. He interviewed family members on the reservation to re-create the story. Both students showcased these films with me at a local conference on pedagogy and popular culture this past spring.

As detailed in Tchudi and Lafer's traits of interdisciplinary teaching, such integrated learning tasks center on issues or problems, use questions and inquiry instead of standard curricular goals and objectives, and rely on constructed versus canonical knowledge (12). Where discipline-centered knowledge is primarily school-centered, relies on lessons, textbooks, and tests and the teacher plays the role of the specialist, in interdisciplinary work such as the project above, assignments are community/real-world centered, students use multiple sources to complete authentic projects, and the teacher's role shifts to that of resource. I've found Green English approaches are best when they exhibit these traits of interdisciplinary teaching.

Precept #3: Talk

Green English, like other complicated and relevant topics, requires authentic conversation; genuine talk in the classroom is the ultimate sustainable practice.

There are many excellent books on different ways to initiate and structure successful classroom discussions, such as *Speaking Volumes* by Barry Gilmore (Heinemann, 2006) and *Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School* (Stenhouse, 2005) by Matt Copeland. I will not detail any specific approach here as I've used informal and formal discussion formats, with and without the use of texts, and believe all can be used effectively. The precept to "talk" is really about providing students opportunities to discuss issues, concepts, and topics related to place, nature, and the environment in whatever format you choose. I have found environmental issues to be a rich source for meaningful dialogue because it is of genuine interest and concern to most students. However, as with most things of personal import, this can also lead to high emotion and potential for conflict. Perhaps this is another reason why teachers sometimes avoid discussions of such issues. But, for these same reasons, taking the risk can be well worth it.

Green English, like other complicated and relevant topics, requires authentic conversation; genuine talk in the classroom is the ultimate sustainable practice.

When I was in high school in the 1980s one of the reasons given for our generation's collective disengagement and apathy was the proverbial "we're all gonna get nuked, anyway." Today's students have their own version of this, eco-nihilism. Derek Owens believes this nihilism is escalating, unconscious, inherited, and rooted in the formal conditions of our environment (68). He explains students' resultant "hyperboredom" leads to violence, depression, self-medication, and a loss of self-worth (69). "Educators have a responsibility to help students resist the cynicism and hyperboredom of contemporary consumer culture . . . [we must] give them opportunities to testify about what is wrong and what is good about those worlds . . . [and] provide them with a vocabulary with which they might critique their environments and develop an awareness of what exactly it is . . . that can make a person miserable, bored, angry, tired, scared, depressed." (69) Owens concludes that without such awareness, reconstructing our environment will be difficult.

Any day of the week I can look in the newspaper and find a topic related to the environment to discuss with my students. Last week it was record-setting pollution and sand storms from refineries and deforestation in Hong Kong; this week, the unexplained mass death of baby whales in the Atlantic. I find that environmental topics loom large in students' lives and that they *want* to talk about them. A few weeks ago, my students had a passionate discussion about the seemingly inevitable treadmill of work-spend-work-spend in our culture. A usually quiet girl blurted, "It's like we just wait our whole lives to die." Another countered, "You don't have to live like this. You can do it differently, you can change things. You can sell your art on the street." Another chimed in, "But, how many of you are willing to give up a hot shower? Or electricity? It's not gonna happen." And on it went. This type of discussion may not lower greenhouse emissions, but I do believe without the conversation we are less likely to initiate even the smallest of changes in our currently unsustainable behavior.

Precept #4: Cultivate Diversity

A look at genetics is a quick reminder that diversity plays an important role in adaptability, growth, and survival. Simply put, homogeny is not healthy. I believe such is the case with curriculum, as well. The three aforementioned precepts all require diversity of methods and resources. However, in this last precept I make the case specifically for textual diversity. There are many fine examples of nature-based literature that have been used in English classrooms such as Japanese and Native American poetry and work by the Transcendentalists. But, what I propose in Green English is to expand readings to include other disciplines and to incorporate less-traditional genres and literary texts.

In addition to titles discussed above, here are some examples of works I've used throughout the years. With struggling readers, we've read Paul Fleischman's *Seedfolks* (a rundown neighborhood comes together and finds hope as they transform a

vacant lot into a community garden) and Alice Hoffman's *Green Angel* (a 15-year-old orphan and gardener must find a way to survive in a post-apocalyptic, ash-covered world). In a unit where students write their own children's books, I've used these "green" books as models and for read-alouds: *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* by Susan Jeffers (a powerful retelling of a speech delivered by Chief Seattle), *Westlandia* by Paul Fleischman (a boy creates a self-sufficient civilization out of a mysterious plant in his backyard), and *The Gardener* by Sarah Stewart (living during the Depression, a farm girl must stay with her uncle in the city, bringing seeds and hope with her). I've also used environmental children's classics such as Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* (this anti-clear-cutting story is his only title to be banned) and Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (though hotly debated, we examine this as a parable about exploitation of the earth).

I've also increased the diversity of materials students encounter in my class by integrating nonfiction and other media. For example, we've read and discussed articles, images, and issues from magazines such as AdBusters, Yes!, and Orion and watched films such as *Affluenza* (about the culture of overconsumption) and *The Corporation* (about globalization, the environment, and human rights). We've studied the political street art of Banksy and Andy Goldsworthy's outdoor sculptures made from purely natural materials. On the Web I've had students calculate their carbon footprint (http://footprintnetwork.org) and watch a short video on the impact of mass production and consumption (http://storyofstuff.com; see Cuff and Statz for detailed lesson ideas). Another online resource I've used, Media That Matters (http://mediathatmatters.org), includes short documentary films, many made by youth, ranging from one to nine minutes in length and exploring a variety of social justice issues. Finally, I've excerpted nonfiction for lessons on the senses (Diane Ackerman's *The Natural History of the Senses*), on descriptive writing from nature (Barry Lopez's *Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape*), and comparing learning from nature to learning from media (Bill McKibben's *The Age of Missing Information*).

Diversity cannot be just window dressing; there is too much at stake. Physicist, ecologist, and activist Vandana Shiva explains it best: "An intolerance of diversity is the biggest threat to peace in our times; conversely, the cultivation of diversity is the most significant contribution to peace—peace with nature and between diverse peoples" (119).

Meet Me at the Edge

When I think back to the Earth Day door contest that began this article, I realize it exemplifies our collective failure to address environmental literacy in the past 50 years. As a teacher, as a school, we gave them so little; that one decorative task was presumably the extent of their environmental education. Our attempts to teach this issue deserve far more time and thought. That I chose to have the students use garbage for the door raises questions: Is this what we want to leave our children? Refuse to sift through to make meaning? Students (and the Earth) deserve more than a life spent repairing our waste and making sense of whatever remains.

Carolyn M. Peterson closes her 1972 *EJ* article by saying, "The environment crisis demands of English teachers, as it demands of everyone else, serious investigation of individual human nature, of man and his social environment, of man and his physical environment. We have the tools and the materials needed for this effort; all we need is an unfaltering will" (124). I attest to all of this except the "unfaltering will" part. Unfaltering will usually falters. This is one of the lessons from the greens of the past. Though I am humbled and ashamed by the urgency of Rachel Carson, the anger of Edward Abbey, and the ideals of Neil Postman, I also readily admit I falter all the time and will continue to do so. But, with tempered 21st-century idealism, I'll still try. I think Peterson would agree this is at least a place to start. There's so much left for us to do.

Notes

1. At the time I missed the disconnect between a door contest and ecological awareness. I realize now that this was a "green" version of what one of my education professors used to call, when referring to reductive "multiculturalism" in the schools, "fairs, foods, and fashions."

2. William R. Catton Jr. labeled this phenomena *cosmeticism* and defined it as "faith that relatively superficial adjustments in our activities will keep the New World new and will perpetuate the Age of Exuberance" (273).

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

A ReadWriteThink.org strategy guide explains Socratic seminars and offers practical methods for applying the approach to help students investigate multiple perspectives in a text. http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/socratic-seminars-30600.html

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Walking in the Morning

What does it mean, say the words, that
the earth is so beautiful? And what
shall I do about it? What is the gift
that I should bring to the world?
—Mary Oliver

Inside me there is only
taking—even from first light
color catches my eye—blue
with white shining
and I have to have my part in it
—one piece of it—like the pie
mother made on Easter eve—
fresh egg custard sweetened
with just the honey summer
left behind—an old jar rattling
on the stove.

But it goes beyond light,
this taking.
It wakes up and walks
out on a pink gravel road
unraveling the sky,
and it says—see I say your names,
genera, species, varietals, cultivars
—come inside and be safe in words.
Just the feel of them linked
to a field of saffron, false indigo
slow to rise out of the ground—
shy flower floating on sea leaves
greening. Until night I repeat them
with the slick gift of calling out
in the fine air I inhabit, take in—
must have.

—Lisa Drnec Kerr

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Kim-Marie Cortez-Riggio

The Green Footprint Project: How Middle School Students Inspired Their Community and Raised Their Self-Worth

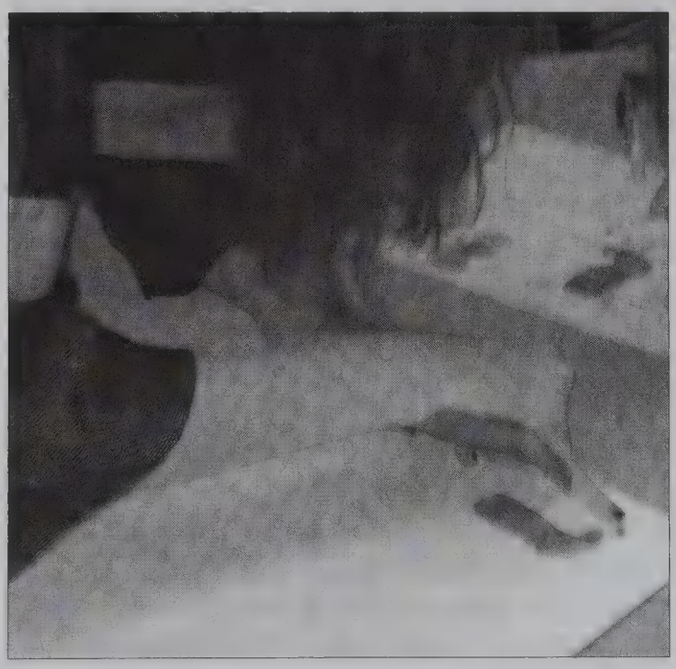
Students complete Internet research, create pamphlets, give presentations, and take on other activities to alert the school community to local environmental issues—and learn valuable ELA skills along the way.

That "Human–environment interactions impact our Earth" seems to resonate within our current generation of students. As a classroom teacher, I hoped that I would act as a catalyst, inspiring my fifth-grade students to become active participants in their world. Using Paulo Freire's pedagogical view of a problem-posing education, I approached my 20 students with a bare idea, "Green Project," knowing that it would be their curiosities, connections, debates, and negotiations that would infuse those skeletal words. Offering only "the practice of freedom" (Freire 89) and minimal guidance, I watched students transform their world through an environment-focused project and, in doing so, I learned that they also transformed themselves into critical thinkers and experienced speakers whose voices had become protectors of the Earth.

As a classroom teacher and doctoral student with interests in pedagogy, identity formation, and multiliteracies (New London Group), I designed a project based on students' intelligences (Gardner), knowing that it would need to be multigenre with big ideas interwoven throughout. Because I wanted to offer the students a choice, I organized a brainstorming session (see fig. 1) to determine a class focus for a local community environment project. My students chose to focus on the air quality outside the school, specifically the carbon emissions produced by idling cars. Project "Green Footprint" was created to remind the citizens of the school (and Earth) to tread lightly on Mother Nature's creations. Figure 2 shows students creating the symbol that would come to represent their cause. The color

FIGURE 1. Students Brainstorming Local, National, and Global Green Issues

FIGURE 2. The "Green Footprint" Is Born



green (not shown in this black-and-white photo) symbolizes the Earth and the footprint represents the mark we leave on our planet, to remind people that our actions are traceable. We worked on this project over five months for approximately three days each week. As a result of "Green Footprint," the students' transformative actions became reflective of how they saw themselves within their school community and the larger world.

Multidisciplinary Activities: Fitting "Green Footprint" into the Curriculum

After choosing their environment theme of local air pollution, the class formed four, mixed-gender cooperative groups of five students each and began storyboarding ideas by writing down important phrases and drawing rudimentary pictures on sticky notes to formulate into a larger action plan. The students also chose to categorize their action ideas into "local," "national," or "global" effects.

Science

The Green Footprint project began with inquiry activities, such as observing surroundings, researching the Internet and books, and taking notes on possible causes of air pollution and its detrimental effects. The idling cars outside our open classroom windows, which allowed harmful fumes to filter in and caused many students to cough, inspired an idea.

One group of students chose to time individual cars that idled, over a period of three school weeks, and convert these data into a carbon footprint (the amount of carbon dioxide emissions produced by an individual) to determine the emissions' impact on air quality. Another group researched how carbon emissions in the air affected children's breathing, especially those with preexisting lung conditions such as asthma. A different group focused on publicity and community awareness. It pondered ways to make their peers aware of this unnecessary situation and promote a greener community. This group took the green footprint idea literally and created bottle-cap necklaces and magnets with a hand-painted, four-toed, green footprint as a branded product (see fig. 3) and a slogan: S.T.O.P. (Each toe had one letter that represented "Stop, Turn Off Pollution.") The students created this product to sell within the school community as

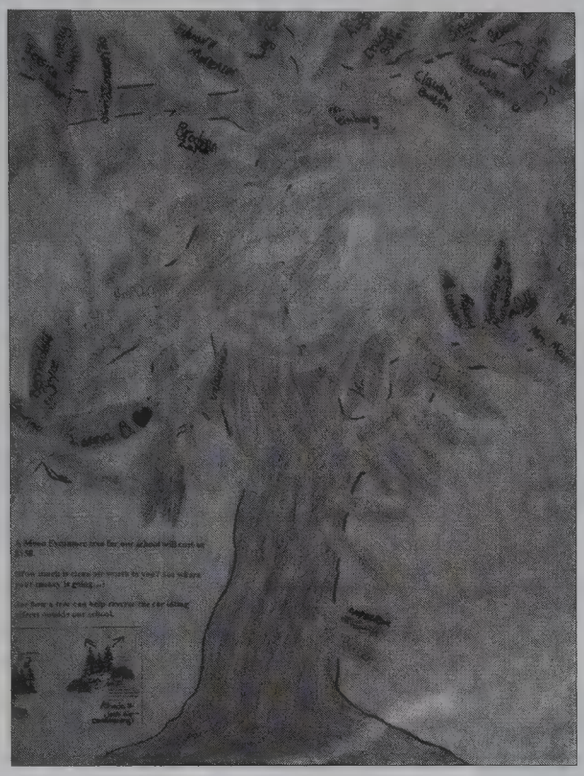
FIGURE 3. Student Volunteers Creating Green Footprint Products

a symbol of support for the Earth. They also chose, after reading about the carbon-oxygen cycle and a tree's role in this, to use 100% of the bottle-cap profits to purchase trees to be planted on school grounds to help offset the carbon emissions produced by idling cars. To represent their goal, each person who purchased a bottle cap wrote their name on a leaf that was placed on a bare tree trunk representation. As shown in Figure 4, the tree flourished and students' goal was accomplished.

The final group researched greenhouse gases and global warming to learn about the long-term global effects of local air pollution. This group was provided with a variety of texts, both digital and traditional, to expedite their research. I used this research time to teach targeted skills, such as how to take and organize notes. Different graphic organizers were introduced, and more direct instruction on search engine use was given to those students who needed more assistance. Examining, cross-referencing, and reflecting on information found on the Internet (within context) allowed me ample opportunities to model critical-thinking skills that the students could then practice and refine within this core activity. Additionally, this group performed a greenhouse gases/ozone layer experiment and then synthesized the information with the other groups' findings to create a "Car Idling Effects" pamphlet that would accompany each bottle-cap purchase.

The class wanted the community to understand how car idling was indirectly harming their local en-

FIGURE 4. Tree-Goal Representation with Signed Leaves



vironment, and how actions, even of children, can make a difference in the world. Bottle-cap orders were astounding, creating a two-week backorder for the hand-painted products by student volunteers.

Math

The students who timed the idling cars entered their data into Microsoft Excel to determine the weekly idling average and corresponding carbon footprints and to create a line graph. They were also able to estimate the amount of gas and money wasted by idling, based on the price of "regular" gas at the time. I encouraged the students to express their findings in a format that they found most appropriate for their audience. Together, we created a list of goals that we hoped the car-idling research would accomplish and loosely formatted their findings and suggestions in a variety of ways (PowerPoint, poster, expository essay, comic, pamphlet). After careful deliberation, the students chose to share these results in an idling pamphlet, along with alternatives such as turning off the ignition, parents meeting their child at school to walk home together, carpooling, and even skateboarding instead of allowing a car to idle outside of the school. The students believed that in addition to promoting clean air practices, the pamphlets would also encourage community members to exercise more and appreciate the natural beauty of the world around them.

Social Studies

The car idling time measurement led the students to the idea of an "idle-free school zone." One group of students researched idle-free school zones within the county, state, and country. Using the note-taking mantra they learned from their Library Media Specialist, "Trash vs. Treasure," to identify important phrases, these students diligently searched school websites. Finding few schools to use as a model or as a source for informal interviews, the students chose to write a letter to their local congressional representative in which they suggested the idea of "idle-free school zones." The students thought to write the representative in part from our "U.S. Government" unit in Social Studies, which teaches students that important ideas can grow into bills and then, if they secure the required votes in each stage of development, evolve into laws. At this time, our writing workshop focused on the purpose and format of business-letter writing. Guided individual practice allowed students to familiarize themselves with this specific genre of writing as they chose to create "complaint or compliment" letters addressed to companies that they had purchased products from. The students made sure to include in their (project) letter their local and global research on car emissions, greenhouse gases, negative health effects, their Excel graph, and interviews with adult and child members of their school community.

After reading about students in Bangalore, India, who had organized a bike rally to lessen the carbon emissions from buses and cars bringing them to and from school, we decided to host our own Global Summit representing five greenhouse-gas-producing countries: the United States of America, Canada, Brazil, India, and China. We chose these countries based on their proximity to the United States (Canada) or their rate of economic development in conjunction with high contribution levels of greenhouse gases. Each group was assigned a country and researched the country's current or proposed environment plan for the Copenhagen 2009 Global Summit. The groups also researched their country's primary manufacturing industry, environmental issues, and population using Web-based research as

their main resource. A focus on the big understanding of "Where we live impacts how we live," along with specific geography skills, permeated this activity. Figures 5 and 6 show students using the Internet to locate, analyze, and discuss relevant information about their assigned country. Students had to decide if the information would support their stance on greenhouse gas production levels. Each group then proposed its own greenhouse gas compromise (the amount the country would be willing to decrease over a predetermined number of years). To generate these compromises, the students practiced negotiation skills and the art of persuasion as they all tried to reach an amicable agreement. It is here where I observed my shyer students begin to control their environment by unabashedly voicing their opinions. Public-speaking anxieties were no longer noticeable. One student reflected on the debate by stating, "It's hard to agree when you're not only looking out for you, but your whole country and the people and kids that live there." Another student responded, "Yeah, but we all share that air."

FIGURE 5. Collaborative Internet Research

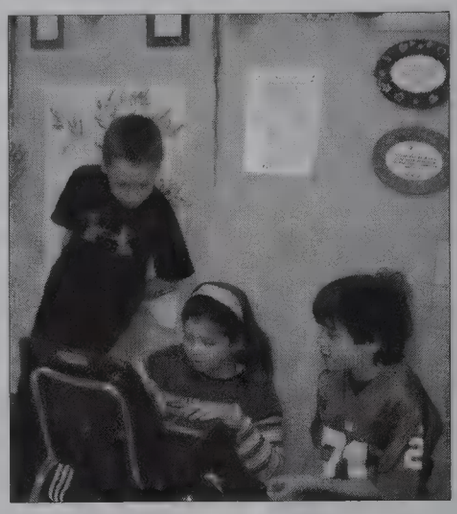


FIGURE 6. Global Summit Preparation

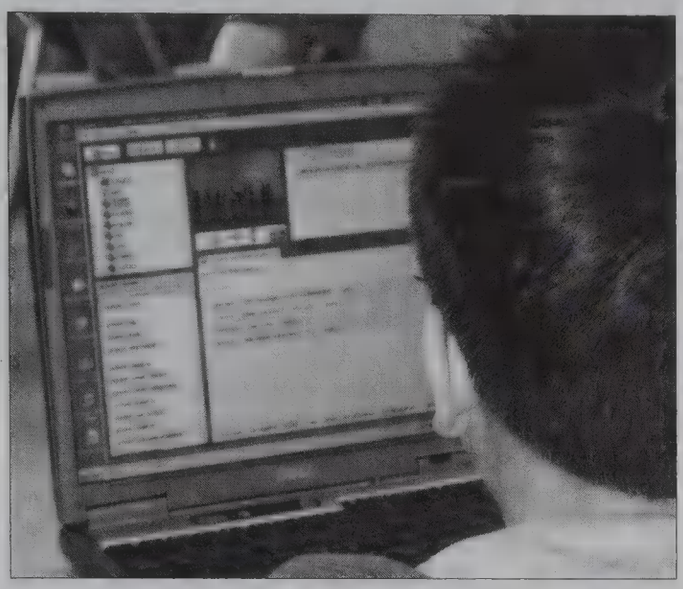
English Language Arts

Committing to this idea that the air (and subsequently our Earth) is shared, the students wanted their environmental messages to be heard by others. They presented the idea of a hosting a "Green Day" at their school to the principal. It was to be entirely organized by the students in my class. After the event was approved, the students created a program that consisted of an opening ceremony in which they would share their Excel graph results, air pollution facts, ways to be more responsible for our Earth, and bottle-cap rationale. Following the opening ceremonies, student groups visited individual classrooms to show grade-specific environment presentations that they created using either Microsoft PowerPoint or the Alice Storytelling program (http://www.alice.org). (See fig. 7.) The Alice program allowed the students to create digital worlds using basic story elements such as setting, problem, solution, and characters (primary and secondary). Presentations allowed the students to practice public speaking. Prior to the Green Day event, I conferenced with individual students to help them set personal presentation skill goals (fluency, eye contact, response to questioning, language use, preparedness). Many students created worlds that were dying because of pollution, but were resurrected after trying one of the solutions that my class created. The audiences connected to these short scenarios and gave positive feedback regarding the Green Day events. A local television station and two local newspapers covered this event as well. When interviewed by the news reporter about the Green Day assembly and our environment project, two students responded, "When we looked out, we knew that we really inspired them to start thinking about ways to save our planet." It was evident that the students' world was expanding and that this recognition of their project's impact on their community was a reflection of a stronger sense of self for each of them. The students also knew that this media coverage meant that children and adults in other towns would hear their message as well. This class environment project went well beyond the school community and gave the students a sense of power that grew from social circumstance, just as Anne H. Dyson found reflected in the children's public performances she observed. Using their own ideas and language use, my students' voices were heard, believed by Paulo Freire and Donald Macedo (20) to be necessary in the development of a positive sense of self-worth.

Students as Catalysts of Social Change

The students learned to position themselves differently because of the Green Footprint Project. They

FIGURE 7. Alice Storytelling Program



became more aware of their existence in a larger world and perhaps they even became more aware of their future life purposes. They were contributing citizens of their community and the world, included in public matters. Similar to Linda K. Crafton, Mary Brennan, and Penny Sivers's critical inquiry project in which elementary students learned to use their voices to support a local elderly woman who was fighting to keep her home and in turn examined the bigger world issue of homelessness, this project allowed my students to use their passion (the environment) along with their interests and individual and collective strengths (technology, public speaking, computations, art, science, written communication) actively to support a cause that extended beyond their local community. If, as Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis (New London Group) believe, social change can come from students and educators that actively design their educational journeys, then I believe my students have become environmental catalysts to their peers and the rest of the world.

Newly planted tree with student-made Dedication Stones.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Communicating on Local Issues: Exploring Audience in Persuasive Letter Writing" further explores this idea. Students will research a local issue and then write letters to two different audiences asking readers to take a related action or adopt a specific position on the issue. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/communicating-local-issues-exploring-945.html

Merrilyne Lundahl

Teaching Where We Are: Place-Based Language Arts

Observing nature and creating personal metaphors from the natural world can help students develop keener writing skills and ecoliteracy.

On the first day of my first-year seminar class, the whiteboard gets covered in dry-erase lettering declaring student names and descriptions of where they are from: White Mountains and fall colors, the windy city and suburbia, coyote and Mormon country, wheat fields and big sky. We are building community and introducing ourselves, but I am also introducing the context of our course: developing habits of mind that create strong thinkers, writers, and citizens. Midway through the semester, Mark will proclaim that the observation journal he's been keeping—spending 20 minutes a week paying attention to the world from his sit spot—is the most relevant thing he's doing in classes so far. This is a course designed to introduce students to difficult texts and scholarly communities; our context is the local Missoula environment, but no one expects an "environmental education" focus. My teaching and personal self is rooted in environmental education. I am a generalist with a background as a language arts teacher, park and forest ranger, and field science educator. While "content" might be foregrounded in my classroom, the environment-at-large is the context and lens that guides my teaching.

David Orr writes that "all education is environmental education. By what is included or excluded, students are taught they are part of or apart from the natural world" (12). I choose to be deliberate about helping students recognize their connection to the natural world in the hope that doing so will allow for a more just and sustainable world. I believe that by using the context students live and learn in, we create a relevant and engaging curriculum. We can use our local places, environmental issues (and all issues are environmental), and people's natural biophilia to improve English education, literacy, and citizenship. Like Orr, I don't believe that "environmental education" belongs to science teachers; it's the work of us all, and it is a natural fit for the engaging English classroom.

Developing Ecoliteracy

This article discusses building ecoliteracy through place-based education (PBE) within English language arts: some ideas of what PBE is, why it's important, and examples of how it might be applied. Place-based education, while a relatively new term, is not a new concept. John Dewey wrote in *The School and Society* that "[e]xperience [outside the school] has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literary, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it" (qtd. in Woodhouse and Knapp 1). Place-based language arts might also be called community-oriented schooling, place-conscious education, bioregional education, sense-of-place education, and ecoliteracy. While my emphasis is primarily on the ecological end of the spectrum, place-based education involves all aspects of a particular locale, including its stories of people past and present.

When people connect to place and make it personal, they become more committed to it. Using students' local place allows for a more authentic and engaged curriculum. © 2009 JupiterImages/Photos.com.

We can use our local places, environmental issues (and all issues are environmental), and people's natural biophilia to improve English education, literacy, and citizenship. © 2009 JupiterImages/Photos.com.

David Sobel writes that place-based education

> is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts . . . and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school. (7)

Place-based language arts include the literature of a place or region as well as writing and other literacy tasks that serve to connect students to place. In writing, this might include descriptive writing of a place, the use of extended metaphors for natural events, reflections on the places one has lived and on favorite places, journal writing that ranges from informational and investigative to resonant and reflective, or research focusing on local and bioregional interests. Literature can be studied from an ecocritical lens and with strong emphasis on the role of setting. Such environmentally and place-conscious teaching is reciprocally beneficial. When people connect to place and make it personal, they become more committed to it. Using students' local place, working within a context of environmental issues, and tapping feelings of biophilia all allow for a more authentic and engaged curriculum. The ideas that follow facilitate this three-pronged approach to greening the English classroom. I draw from various settings, but all the ideas can be applied in an English language arts setting.

Greening English through Place-Based Education

As an instructor at Teton Science School, I often had one week with students who came from across the country. To build community and situate ourselves within the geography we inhabit, we would write a class "I Am From" poem. To do this, I would have students include their name and some characteristic of the place they were from: others who live there; the history of the place; its culture, geology, food, art, plants, animals, commodities—anything. A way to think about this is what makes the place you and your students are from what it *is*—what is Missoulian about Missoula, Montanan about Montana?

In the secondary English classroom, try "Reading like a Writer" with place-based picture books, which can foreground place with illustrations. This activity is a good introduction to ways that "sense of place" can function within text. Is it more than setting? Can place function as a character? Is it a theme? Does it drive the plot or situate some conflict? We read *Harlem* by Walter Dean Myers (Scholastic, 1997), *All the Places to Love* by Patricia MacLachlan (Harper, 1994), *Signs along the*

River: Learning to Read the Natural Landscape by Kayo Robertson (Rinehart, 1986), and *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* by Byrd Baylor (Aladdin, 1986/1995). There are numerous other texts that rely heavily on place. Be careful not to privilege one "idyllic" setting, but to provide a variety of places: urban, rural, wild, suburban. Discuss how "placeness" functions for the author, the characters, the text, and you. Consider adapting Katie Wood Ray's noticing, theorizing, naming, relating, and envisioning strategies of reading like a writer through the lens of "sense of place." This is an activity that can illuminate for students how important setting is and help them situate themselves and their stories within a setting. See Ray's *The Writing Workshop: Working through the Hard Parts (And They're All Hard Parts)* for more ideas.

When students in rural Blanding, Utah, were asked to create a map of their home-places, many who had previously been disengaged lit up.

When students in rural Blanding, Utah, were asked to create a map of their home-places, many who had previously been disengaged lit up. By inviting them to create maps that include places of significance, students bring in authority and can gain access to memories and stories that help them construct and articulate a sense of place. Such maps are rich with prewriting activities. Published memoirs and fiction frequently include maps in the front matter. Some ideas to get started include David Sobel's *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years* (Heinemann, 1998) and Hannah Hinchman's *A Trail through Leaves: The Journal as a Path to Place* (Norton, 1997/1999).

Teachers in any discipline can offer invitations for speculative writing about place. Pablo Neruda wrote, "Pardon me, if when I want / to tell the story of my life / it's the land I talk about" (23). We don't need to excuse students who want to tell such stories, but to encourage their place-based identities and give them opportunities to explore and express them. Students can respond in their writer's notebooks to questions that get at the value of place and how it informs them. For example, Do you have a "place of enchantment"? What is a sense of place? Where is the place that you consider home? What makes a place a place and not just a spot on Google Earth? Has place affected the person you are, and if so, how?

I use an activity from my ninth-grade English teacher that has students complete research specific to their local place. We ask questions about who lived in the area 400 years ago, the phase of the moon, birds students might see on a given day, native mammals, native trees, wild plants that can be eaten safely, the first flowers to bloom, where the tap water comes from, and where the trash goes. To answer these questions, students must depend on local knowledge and pay attention to their physical world. This attentiveness builds observation skills, seems to make students feel a sense of connection to their natural community, and as an added perk, it's a research paper virtually impossible to plagiarize off the Internet.

Making Personal Metaphors from the Environment

Another invitation that helps students connect to place is to make place personal through metaphor by connecting inner and outer landscapes. When I worked as a naturalist-ranger at Grand Teton National Park, one of my duties was to lead a geology hike. I love science but am also numerically inept. I couldn't keep my million-years-agos and ice ages straight and frequently was mixing up metamorphic and igneous formations. To compensate for this, my "interpretive hike" became about making geography personal. We talked about succession, cycles, time, relationships, communities, composition of rocks, journeys of water molecules, erosional forces at a personal level. When I taught at Teton Science School, I did the same thing—I tried to get students to relate in a real way to what we studied. It might look something like the following in an ELA classroom:

Metaphor is one vehicle for exploring inner and outer landscapes and to connect the personal with environmental. I start with excerpts from Barry Lopez's "Landscape and Narrative":

> I think of two landscapes—one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see—not only the line and color of the land and its shading at different times of day, but also its

plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution. (64)

The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape. Relationships in the exterior landscape include those that are named and discernable . . . and others that are uncodified or ineffable. . . . That these relationships have purpose and order, however inscrutable they may seem to us, is a tenet of evolution. Similarly, the speculations, intuitions, and formal ideas we refer to as "mind" are a set of relationships in the interior landscape with purpose and order; some of these are obvious and many impenetrably subtle. . . . The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes. (65)

Beyond this—that the interior landscape is a metaphorical representation of the exterior landscape, that the truth reveals itself most fully not in dogma but in the paradox, irony, and contradictions that distinguish compelling narratives—beyond this there are only failures of imagination: reductionism in science; fundamentalism in religion; fascism in politics. (71)

After reading and reflecting on this piece, students are invited to play with the concepts of having an inner landscape and how it might be shaped by the exterior landscape. Then, they work to find some element of the natural world and apply it as a metaphor for some element in their own lives. I provide some springboard material for students. A brainstorm might yield the following:

cycles: water, nitrogen, hydrogen, fire, etc.

history: places and individuals are shaped by those who came before

communities: the building blocks of ecosystems, made up of individuals

progression/succession: the movement from rocks to lichen to dirt to plants to trees

diversity: the variety of species

interactions and relationships: between abiotic (such as wind, slope, aspect, etc.) and biotic (living) factors; between individuals and species—mutualism, parasitism, competition, predation, etc.

geologic processes: erosion, weathering, mountain building events, compositions of rocks, faults and earthquakes

change and disturbance: after natural disasters (fire, tsunami, hurricane, etc.) or as a result of human management or interference (extraction industries, grazing, development, etc.)

Provide examples as needed. A favorite of mine for middle school students involves engulfer macroinvertebrates, such as the giant water beetle that pierces its insect prey and then sucks out all of its fluids. Do students hang out with people like that, people who are energy and life sucking forces?

Another good example that is easy to see is relationships—such as the symbiosis of lichen. Lichen is made up of fungus and algae, with the fungi providing the structure and the algae making the food. They are dependent on each other. Working jointly, the algae and fungus break down rocks and make soil. What are examples students have that deal with similar mutually beneficial relationships, where working together gets more done than working alone?

The extended metaphor goes beyond comparisons between self and some natural part of the exterior landscape. It can be a good way for moving a narrative, for reflection, for vivid imagery, for a way into a piece of writing.

This invitation seems to elicit some deep responses from students, taking them sometimes to painful places. This happens for me when I make metaphor out of the landscapes of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and my inner landscape. I compare my struggles to the creation of the Teton Range, with its upheavals, stretching, snapping, ice, glaciations, water, and time. The eroding forces were building forces, too, and I realize that in my life, as with these rugged peaks, nothing beautiful happens easily. Using metaphor to connect students and the natural world has potential to make them think differently and ultimately to help them make place or nature personal. This is but one instance of what might be considered place-based writing, particularly if it is done using local landscapes and phenomena.

Finally, simply ask students to pay attention to the natural world. Observation is the key skill of

writers, and encouraging observation of the environment students live and learn in transfers to stronger knowledge and appreciation of the natural world and to stronger writing. As described by John Tallmadge, observation consists of three elements: description, interpretation, and speculation (Leslie, Tallmadge, and Wessels 16). The descriptive level asks questions about what something is like, what it does, its distinctive features, its sensory components. Interpretive questions wonder how something got this way, why it is here, who its neighbors are, where it came from, what processes and patterns it participates in, and the subject's ultimate concerns. Speculative questions ask what this thing has to teach us, how it addresses me, how it speaks to the human world, and what universal truths it embodies, suggests, or represents (16).

Observation is the key skill of writers, and encouraging observation of the environment students live and learn in transfers to stronger knowledge and appreciation of the natural world and to stronger writing.

Winning the Race

When Mark proclaimed that spending 20 minutes a week to pay attention was the most relevant thing he had done so far in classes, it was because his observation journal and sit spot helped him develop habits of mind necessary to being a critical, creative, engaged student—and citizen. Similar activities infused into the ELA curriculum can help students do the same. H. G. Wells wrote that we're in a race between education and catastrophe; by greening the English language arts, we put our stakes on education.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Walt Whitman as a Model Poet: 'I Hear My School Singing'" invites students to use Whitman's poem as the inspiration to reflect critically on key figures, memories, and events from their educational community. Students review their school website and use a graphic organizer to analyze various aspects of their school environment. Using "I Hear America Singing" as a model, they then create list poems that reflect a representation of that community. They also reflect on those individuals or groups who might have been omitted from their poems. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/walt-whitman-model-poet-989.html

Elliot Jacobs

Re(Place) Your Typical Writing Assignment: An Argument for Place-Based Writing

Assignments that explore connections between place, personhood, literacy, and democracy can make powerful and inspiring topics for students.

Getting to know home is the most human and necessary of occupations. To give that power of observation to students is to give them something of infinite value and importance—something to do with the rest of their lives.

—*Ann Zwinger, "Introduction: To Learn from Wood and Stone"*

Daniel walks quietly into my composition class. He dresses casually—Carhartts and T-shirts—and takes his seat with a sincere nod to his neighbor. Though he rarely says much, when he does I'm surprised by how gentle, almost timid, his voice sounds. If I were tallying, Daniel would have the worst participation grade in the whole class—he speaks reluctantly, and only when prompted. The rest of the time, Daniel follows class raptly, with an inscrutable smile.

I was very happy the day I received an essay from Daniel, excerpted here:

> Many people live their whole lives in one place, never really looking around them to see what their environment has to offer. The concrete jungle can quickly become the only jungle people can see. In my view, this way of life isn't very full-filling and can quickly become monotonous. I was on this same path as a fifteen-year-old in my hometown of Columbia Falls, Montana. I was constantly roaming the streets looking for something that would make me happy, but coming up short almost every night. My friends and I started doing stupid things like breaking into abandoned buildings at night, destroying as much shit as we could, and leaving before the cops got there. Surfing through town on my skateboard, I was becoming more and more aware of the repetition and lack of variety that town life had to offer. I started wandering further away from town every day until I found the rock that would end up changing my entire way of thinking.

Though it may not seem like it, this assignment ended up being the turning point of my semester as a teaching assistant at the University of Montana; it was one of the first pieces of student writing that a student was excited to write, and that I was thrilled to read.

A former environmental educator and wilderness trip leader, I thought that the natural world might be something that interested all of us in class. I left the prompt deliberately open-ended: "Compose a personal essay that explores some aspect of the relationship between your identity and a place." I handed out examples (Wallace Stegner's "The Dump Ground" and Terry Tempest Williams's "Yucca"), and we went over them in class, noting the features of the genre. We did invention work and fastwriting. I asked only that they refrain from writing about their dorm room, because, for most of my students, they had only arrived a few weeks before.

Two weeks later when I collected their essays, I was amazed by the students' writing—for many of them, their lives had taken on vivid colors in response to places that they cared about. In addition

to Daniel's essay about the boulder, I read with growing excitement Laura's account of the burned-down mill (where "the grief clung to her family like sawdust") in her small town, Tony's description of the hill just above Interstate 90 near Coeur D'Alene where he once saw a bear, and Jessica's essay about coming of age at the magical Grandstreet Theater. When we performed a read-around on the day that the assignments were due, there was genuine excitement among the students.

Through that assignment and since, I have found that connections between place, personhood, literacy, and democracy can make powerful and inspiring topics for students. Effective place-based writing assignments are process-focused, inquiry-based, and genre-specific. They can help students specifically with the elusive quality of *voice,* obligating them to write effectively from experience and positioning them to take action by bearing witness.

Terry Tempest Williams, author of *Refuge* and *Pieces of White Shell,* identifies herself as "a naturalist writer." One of the first assignments she gives students is a "natural autobiography":

> I ask them to write their personal evolution through their relationship to the natural world. If we are to be writing about landscape, we must be able to reflect on our own sense of place. Through this exercise they are reminded where the source of their power lies—in story, in the Earth and their relationship to life. . . I believe if we are to move toward a peaceful future on this planet, it will require each of us to step forward with our own story, trusting the truth of our experience, to simply tell it straight. (qtd. in Petersen 87)

Place-based writing is grounded in reflection, observation, and personal histories. In this way, place-based writing is similar to environmental literature; it requires a balance between narrative and landscape—the story and the space share the spotlight.

Like Williams, I believe that place-based writing affords students an opportunity to write meaningfully about themselves, grounded in a place that they know. Place-based writing is versatile and can be additive—taking just a week or two within a semester of different projects—or transformative, if positioned as the theme for an entire course.

If students can learn to write about themselves and their place on the planet, from that they can extend outward. By asking students to double back on themselves—to speak of the past and their place—students, by definition, write from positions of authority. With this authority comes agency, and with that, the willingness to make their voices heard in new genres and spaces.

What follows are four thematic features of place-based writing that I believe make it an indispensible part of a curriculum that seeks critical and environmental literacy.

I. Place-Based Writing Is Personal

Place-based writing is grounded in reflection, observation, and personal histories. In this way, place-based writing is similar to environmental literature; it requires a balance between narrative and landscape—the story and the space share the spotlight. "Experience," writes Stephen Trimble in *Words from the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing,* "is where naturalist writers begin. . . . [They] ponder, analyze, and make choices" (6). Naturalist writers are required to use experience and observation as evidence for their claims. Because of this, place-based writing is unapologetically personal.

While some find academic writing more central to school writing instruction than personal writing, the personal nature of place-based writing is one of its strengths. Paulo Freire reminds us that the purpose of education is for learners to "develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves" (83; italics in original). *Praxis* requires reflection and action; the world and the word are inseparable. Carolyn Matalene makes a powerful argument for using experience as evidence:

> Most students quickly learn that the easiest, safest, least risky method is to keep private and public separate. This seems to me seriously wrong . . . we should be encouraging many voices, not turning them all into one. Surely, teaching students that they have the right and the responsibility to add their own unique voices to the American conversation is why we teach writing anyway. Surely, we want to strengthen their individual, private voices so that one day they may speak, not just listen, and act, not just watch. (188–89)

Matalene articulates the fundamental rationale for encouraging students to write from experience—it honors their voice, encourages their efforts, and, ultimately, follows Freire's idea of *praxis* from reflection to action to make better citizens.

Writing from experience allows students space to reflect on their experiences, perceptions of the land, and, tangentially, the moral conceptions that inform those beliefs. This kind of inquiry leads to unique, vivid writing. The poet Gary Snyder describes this connection between language and experience:

> Ordinary Good Writing is like a garden that is producing exactly what you want, by virtue of lots of weeding and cultivating. What you get is what you plant, like a row of beans. But really good writing is both inside and outside the garden fence. It can be a few beans, but also some wild poppies, vetches, mariposa lilies, ceanothus, and some juncos and yellow jackets thrown in . . . . Its connection to the wildness of language and imagination helps give it power. (qtd. in McEwen and Statman xvi)

According to Snyder, the uniqueness of experience and place combine to give the elusive quality of "voice," as well as providing a reason to write.

There are risks when students write from personal experience. Inexperienced writers risk slipping into solipsism when attempting to convey genuinely meaningful experiences. For example, in an essay about a hometown football stadium, one of my students connected his experience of place with the necessity to work hard, give 100%, and never give up. In some ways, this student mistook repetition for reflection.

The problems with this kind of writing—its formulaic quality and rehashed sentiment—stem less from the beliefs or attitudes of the writer and more from the predetermined nature of the place about which he writes. The writer substituted a slogan on a locker room wall for genuine reflection—he was, to use Snyder's analogy, too far within the garden walls. This dichotomy is what brings me to the next theme of place-based writing: there are no slogans on trees. In a culture that consistently thinks for us—tells us what a fourth-quarter loss *means,* regardless of what it *means to us*—place-based writing is one arena where students can enter into unmediated relationships with place.

II. Place-Based Writing Is Focused on Relationships

There are oceanographers who spend time studying what are called "convergence zones." These are areas of the ocean where two water bodies meet—say, the current from the Northern California Bight and the Equatorial Countercurrent. Characterized by a divergence in water temperatures or salinity, these convergence zones are the most productive part of the ocean. When two water bodies meet, deep water—sometimes as deep as 100 meters—is thrust toward the surface in a process called upwelling. This upwelling makes these areas incredibly active—birds swoop to eat the fish that come to eat the plankton drug up from the cold, subsurface water.

I believe that the nexus of place and person is a little bit like the oceanic convergence zones. Where the person that we are and a place that helped shape us meet is an area of great creative and psychological activity. In the same way that, according to Matalene, "rationality *follows* rhetoric, emerges *from* discourse," meaningful writing both grows out of and reflects back on a connection with place (190; italics in original). This explains, I think, the rapid improvement in the essays where students wrote about themselves within the context of a meaningful place. Sandy Bangert and Robert E. Brooke describe this nexus in *Rural Voices: Place-Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing*: all writers "need ways to connect their literacy to the world around them—to the places, people, and interests that make their world personally meaningful" (23). Expanding on this, I believe that the reason that place-based writing is both essential and transformative is because of its dialectical nature. The boulder in Daniel's essay gave him the context to write about his experience, and vice-versa. Similarly, David Orr, author of *Earth in Mind,* observes that, "In a sense, *Walden* wrote Thoreau" (87). The intertwining, recursive nature of place to person, person to place, provides the upwelling that makes for vivid, personal, powerful writing.

By grounding writing, literally, in the land, writers can speak meaningfully about themselves without talking, strictly, *about* themselves. Orr de-

scribes this phenomenon as "the potential lying untapped in the commonplace, in our own places, in ourselves, and the relation between all three" (86). This relationship can make for vivid, honest, and engaged writing.

III. Place-Based Writing Has Democratic Virtues

The mandate of the humanities classroom extends far beyond helping people to read and write; the humanities have the potential to lessen the affective distance between students and places. Biologist Stephen Jay Gould argues that we cannot win the battle to save species and environments without "forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we do not love" (9). This idea of love—rarely discussed in the academy—is furthered by Freire, who argues that "Love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others" (89). This commitment—the implicit goal of place-based education—is also intrinsic toward making any effort to conserve communities and landscapes.

Commitment is fostered both through exposure to place and meaningful reflection about place. Returning to Daniel's essay, he writes about this sort of commitment in relation to the boulder that he's discovered:

> [W]ord got out about the boulder, making it a hot spot for local high school parties. While going to the boulder one day to fish, I came upon a large hole at the top of the cliff about one hundred yards from the boulder. At the bottom, I saw a huge pile of beer cans and other random pieces of trash. My heart sank, but at the same time I became very angry and upset at the fact that the majority of the people in town didn't seem to care about the environment they lived in. It really bothered me that these people were too lazy to pick up their trash, or just didn't care enough to. I came back the next day and filled a garbage bag and packed it out, something I don't think I would have done if I hadn't been affected by all of the amazing things I witnessed on that rock.

This passage is indicative of what Randy Bomer calls "handover." "Handover," writes Bomer, "has happened in social action when a young person notices a problem in the world that needs attention

Connecting to a natural area, even a boulder by a pond, can help one feel concern for the environment. © JupiterImages/Photos.com

and, without the prompting of authority, by virtue of her own freedom and habits of acting, she tries to do something about it" (307). Daniel's version of democratic action takes the forms both of physical action—removing the trash from the area surrounding the boulder—as well as literacy—writing and sharing his essay with his peers.

Daniel's next writing assignment was an environmentally centered op-ed that he titled "Missoula's Stagnant Air and Image." Daniel had, in effect, joined the conversation. Sidney I. Dobrin and Christian R. Weisser describe this process of re-situating discourse in new situations and audiences. A critical pedagogy of the environment must "encourage political activism, public writing and service learning . . . Students should be encouraged to use their writing to affect change, to bring about awareness, to promote their own political agendas . . . Passive learning neither provides students with writing scenarios in which they encounter real audiences, nor does it promote ecological awareness and participation" (58). To help students reach a place where they feel that their writing has the power to affect change—either in the world or in their own lives—I propose that we invite them to write *from* personal experience, *about* meaningful places.

IV. All the Earth Is Holy

Place-based teaching raises the question of what kinds of places facilitate meaningful writing—are all places created equal? Wes Jackson, in *Becoming*

Native to This Place, argues that "either all the earth is holy, or none is" (67). Further, Joni Adamson, author of *American Indian Literature: Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism,* reminds us of the dangers of "marginaliz[ing] or ignor[ing] that segment of nature that includes the human or social sphere" (14). Because of this, it is essential that a pedagogy that embraces writing about place also embraces all places as worthy of writing about.

What might this look like? Richard Hugo's poem, "What the Brand New Freeway Won't Go By," provides a striking example of how a writer can ground an inquiry within an urban context—in this case, my home, Seattle. Hugo begins his poem at ground level, "The block is bare except for this five-story / ugly brick hotel." From there he moves up and out, to the second floor where a roomer "unshaven, fries a meal" and finally up, past the collapsing rooming house.

What strikes me as particularly relevant about Hugo's poem is both its commitment to a specific place as well as the sense of the poem as a way of bearing witness. Donald Murray suggests that "writing to testify" is one of the primary motives for literacy (7). Accordingly, we can "bear witness *for* as well as *against*" (7; italics in original). By using place-based pedagogy to teach writing, we give students the opportunity to write with reverence about a diverse city block or with consternation about a clear-cut hillside.

The possibilities of writing to testify become increasingly important in a place-based pedagogy, which necessarily begins in students' local places and moves outward. John Tallmadge argues that "With shrines like Yosemite glowing on our mental horizon, it's easier to ignore the natural world at our doorstep, which serves as a constant reminder of how deeply industrial culture has savaged original ecosystems . . . we don't see, in short, because we don't want to see, for seeing might embarrass us into action, or at least into learning, which always takes work. But part of the writer's and the teacher's duty is bearing witness" (4). In a culture that has, for the last 40 years or so, waged a successful battle *against* unique places—transforming quirky storefronts into Best Buys and replacing Aurora Avenue with I-5—the act of bearing witness is both a civic necessity and solution to the problem of helping students separate what they think from what they've been told that they should think. Through writing about specific places, with the intention of bearing witness, students have the opportunity to engage in making meaning—re-inhabiting their commonplace, lived world.

The Boulder

In the end, I think that Daniel's image of the boulder, which he describes in another section of his essay as precariously balanced "yet strangely able to keep itself from rolling into the river," could serve as a useful metaphor for the kind of writing that we should ask our students to do. To write personally—to climb on the boulder—is always a risk. What if it tumbles into the river? When we write personally about the spaces that matter to us, we always face exposure. Writing takes *courage.* As educators, our goal is to invite students to take that risk.

Place-based teaching raises the question of what kinds of places facilitate meaningful writing—are all places created equal?

Beyond its use for fulfilling our professional and ethical imperative to help students succeed, place-based teaching may also assist progressive educators in finding ways to appeal to students' better angels in service of environmental justice and reverence for life. Adamson describes this hope:

> In much American nature writing, there is an inherent hope, an abiding faith, that writers may be able to aid in this battle by reawakening a sense of the beauty of local places, and, as a result, reactivate a sense of care for the environment. *Place,* as it is most often used in this literature, means much more than a point on a map, a geographical location. It is the sights, sounds, and experiences that humans associate with a location; it is space humanized. (70; italics in original)

I've suggested one productive invitation for students to humanize their place, to fish in the convergent zone where place and personhood come together. Place-based pedagogy in writing both complements and complicates the use of environmental literature in the humanities classroom. The personal nature of placed-based teaching ensures that when students choose to climb on the boulder, it stays rooted a little longer, and that the vista that they look out on is their own.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "It's My Life: Multimodal Autobiography Project," students write autobiographies, illustrate them, and set them to music. Music is a powerful tool to evoke emotion, and students carefully select songs to accompany the stories from their lives. They then create storyboards in preparation for a final PowerPoint project. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/life-multimodal-autobiography-project-1051.html

2011 Student Award Programs

Submission information and entry forms are available for NCTE's Promising Young Writers program for eighth-grade students (deadline: **February 1, 2011**). See http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/pyw for more information.

Submission information and entry forms are available for NCTE's Achievement Awards in Writing program for eleventh-grade students (deadline: **February 16, 2011**). See http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/aa for more information.

Donna L. Miller and Alleen Pace Nilsen

Sustainability and the Recycling of Words

The authors suggest ways of using the Green movement to encourage students to become more knowledgeable about how technology and culture change English language.

With the mention of *sustainability* and *recycling,* most people think about reusing paper, plastic, metal, and glass, but what we discovered when we embarked on a word-study unit is that the sustainability movement has also brought about the recycling of words. We were team-teaching a language awareness class taken by preservice teachers, and when we wanted to demonstrate how language changes in response to new technologies and new attitudes, sustainability seemed like the perfect topic. So, rather than starting with dictionaries or with the alphabetical lists of words currently being studied in local high schools, we looked in our reading baskets at home and brought in seven recent magazine articles and three newspaper stories.

To help students focus on our reason for bringing in the materials, we highlighted words and phrases in the articles and then laminated them so we could use them in more than one class. As an introduction to the unit, we had students work in groups of two or three to read the articles and to collect "unusual" words and phrases under such headings as *Acronyms, Geological Terms, Humor, International Words, Metaphors and Similes, Metonyms, Technical Terms,* and *Variations on Green.* We also invited students to bring in articles or advertisements that they ran across in their own reading. Over the unit, we collected nearly 200 words and phrases related to sustainability and were genuinely surprised to discover that none of them were brand-new words. They had all been adapted and recycled from existing words.

The word that came the closest to being new—at least to many of us—was *edamame,* which we couldn't find in our class dictionaries but which two students—one who works as a waitress and one who is from Turkey—explained was the Asian name for regular soybeans that are still green. On Google, we found several *edamame* sites and as a class concluded that marketers had gone looking for a new and exotic-sounding name when they discovered that the beans, which are a beautiful shade of *spring green,* are so aesthetically pleasing that selling or serving them has become a new kind of *eco-label.*

Green as a Metonym

Metonymy is the linguistic process through which the name of an attribute that is closely associated with something appears as a metaphorical name for the larger concept. When we first began our unit, we talked about *sustainability,* but we soon grew tired of saying and writing a six-syllable word when we could get by with the one-syllable *green,* which through *metonymy* has become closely associated with the concept of sustainability.

Headline writers obviously prefer the succinctness of *green,* as shown by the fact that it occurred in the headings for five of the ten articles we worked with. In the articles themselves, we found *green* used as part of two proper names (*Greenpeace, U.S.A.* and *Phoenix Green Chamber of Commerce*), as part of a compound (*greenhouse-gas emissions*), as a verb (*to help green a local business*), as a plural noun

Students discuss the compilation of their findings on green as a metonym for the environmental movement.

(*industries in favor of the greens*), as an adverb (*Think Green!*), as a gerund (*the vitally important greening of commerce*), and as adjectives (*the green team of advisers at the White House,* a *green recession,* and *green energy initiatives*).

Our students decided that *green* is a perfect metonym for the sustainability movement because even people who live in deserts value green plants; plus, the word already has many positive connotations, ranging from the color of money to "*green* lights mean *go.*" In golf, *the green* is the most carefully manicured part of the course, while the *Green Berets* are the most skilled and the best-trained soldiers. There is even something positive in situations that make someone else *green with envy* or when a newcomer is called a *greenhorn* with the expectation that in the future the person will develop experience.

We came away from our study with a new appreciation for the importance of metaphors and similes, not just as a poetic device but also as a way to communicate basic real-world information.

The most interesting usage of *green* came in a one-page article in *Time* magazine describing *carrotmobs,* a term for activist groups who practice a kind of *reverse boycott.* Instead of punishing businesses that worsen the environment, they reward businesses that support sustainability. *Carrotmob* alludes to the old adage about motivating your donkey by hanging a carrot in front of its nose rather than by beating it with a stick. The author of the article, Jeremy Caplan, explained that "reverse boycotts" are perfect for the growing cadres of *slacktivists,* which he defined as "*slackers* who care about causes just enough to sign online petitions and join Facebook protest pages but lack the time, money or drive" to do much more than adjust the time and the place when they go out to buy "products they were planning to buy anyway." In keeping with the spirit of his metaphor, Caplan wrote that carrotmobs "have *branched out* to ten other U.S. cities—with *offshoots* in Finland and France." He ended with the cleverly contradictory sentence, "Carrots are looking greener every day" (Caplan 54).

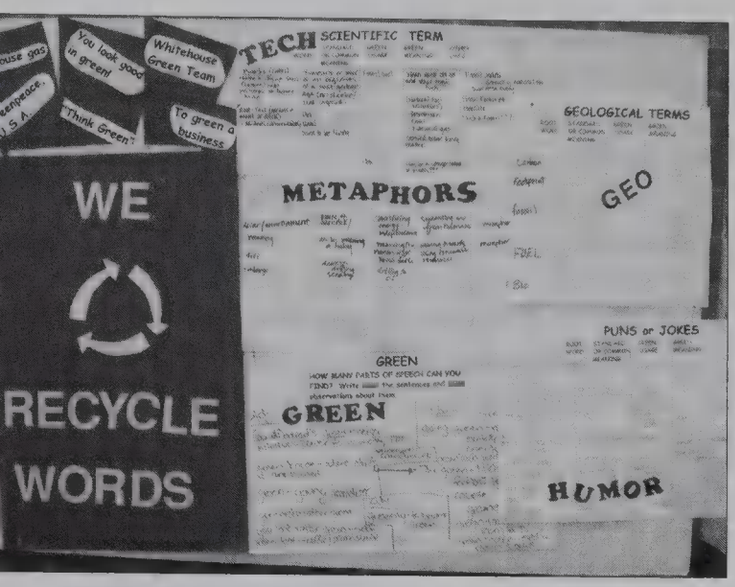
Natural has also become a metonym for both *sustainability* and *organic.* We see *natural* more often than *organic* because federal regulations must be met before a product can be described as organic, but no such restrictions limit the words *natural* and *nature.* And it is fairly easy to create "second-generation" metonymous words or even to use colors (greens, browns, and other earth tones) to elicit thoughts of nature and sustainability.

The Importance of Metaphors and Similes

The fact that we found recyclings instead of new words does not imply a lack of creativity. We came away from our study with a new appreciation for the importance of metaphors and similes, not just as a poetic device but also as a way to communicate basic real-world information.

For example, when Bryan Walsh described the windmills of Denmark, he wrote, "The turbines' blades are as smooth as an Olympic swimsuit and honed to aero-dynamic perfection." He also wrote about *harvesting* the sun and *scooping* the wind. The title of his article, "The Gusty Superpower," was designed to make readers think about *gusts* of wind while also admiring the *gutsy* approach that the Danes are taking in controlling "one-third of the global wind market" and sharing an *electrical grid,* which enables them to "take power from its neighbors when there's no wind and sell it when the breeze blows" (Walsh, "Gusty" 42–43).

Even something as simple as changing the tense of a verb can bring contrasting images to readers' minds, as shown in a major article in *Time* magazine entitled "A River Ran through It." This play on the name of the prize-winning 1992 film, *A River Runs through It,* was printed directly on a double-page photo of an abandoned hand pump sitting on a dry, concrete platform in the middle of a desolate, brown desert, backgrounded by an equally dry and



We folded over a piece of blue poster board to make a "recycle bin" for storing and displaying news clippings and student work.

barren mountain range. The title and the dramatic image effectively remind us of the full, flowing river that is the real star of Robert Redford's film set in the 1920s near Missoula, Montana.

However, as our students reminded us, they were toddlers in 1992, so we had to explain the allusion to them and also to talk about how geographers metaphorically refer to the area of the High Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, which was the subject of the *Time* article, as the *third pole* or the *water tower of Asia* because of the size and the depth of the glaciers. Author Bryan Walsh explained that every spring when the ice thaws and the snow melts, these glaciers *birth* the great rivers of the region and *nurse* the Ganges, the Indus, the Brahmaputra, the Mekong, the Yellow, and the Yangtse Rivers, which provide material and *spiritual sustenance* to nearly half of the world's population (Walsh, "River" 58).

In keeping with the seriousness of the issue, metaphors relating to birth, sustenance, life, and death appeared in several of the articles, as when one writer referred to the *nascent* wind industry. *Nascent* comes from the Latin root *natus,* meaning "to be born," and relates to such words as *natal, nativity,* and *native.* An allusion to *the womb of the ocean* also made us think of birth and sustenance, as did a commentator who argued that President Obama's ending of the 30-year-old drilling embargo was setting back the goal of *weaning* the nation off fossil fuels. Another complained that the irregular way the United States handles tax credits for renewable energy *smothers infant green industries in the crib,* while in another of our articles, the writer was complaining about a good idea being *sacrificed on the altar of sustainability.*

Different Conventions of Reading

Besides explaining allusions to popular-culture events taking place before our students were born, we discovered some other conventions of reading that we needed to address with students. One is that because of the development of new technologies, as well as the creation of new organizations, writers commonly save space by relying on acronyms. Sometimes, they define the acronym the first time it is used, as when *IWMI* was followed in parentheses by *International Water Management Institute.* However, we found that students often skipped over such definitions, so we needed to encourage them to "read backwards" when they ran across initials they did not understand.

Some initials were considered so common that authors used them without definitions, but not everyone knew their meanings. When we talked about them, usually someone in the class had a good explanation, but we were nevertheless surprised at how many students had faulty information. For example, one student thought "gas guzzling *SUV*s" was a reference to *SubUrban Vehicles* rather than to *Sport Utility Vehicles,* and only a few students knew that *R&D* stands for *Research and Development.* While everyone knew that the *G-8* had something to do with a mutual agreement by eight countries, we had to look it up to discover that the organization was started by France in 1975 as the Group of Six (France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States). When Canada joined in 1976, it became the G-7, and Russia's signing on in 1997 resulted in the G-8. Contemporary references can be either to the annual summit meeting or to the members of the group.

The hardest acronym for us to figure out was *bbl,* which occurred in such references as "1.8 billion bbl. of oil." Students said that if it were in caps, it could have been the text message "Be Back Later," but we knew that didn't make sense. Finally, someone found a story online—the students were much faster than we were at pulling out their PEDs (Portable Electronic Devices)—that explained that the term is thought to stand for "blue barrels," which were made in the late 1800s by the Standard Oil Company. This company was the first

to manufacture steel barrels specifically for oil and to standardize the volume at 42 gallons instead of the more common 40 gallons, the approximate size of wooden barrels previously used for miscellaneous goods. Today, oil is stored and shipped in tankers, rather than in barrels, which means that the *bbl* measurement is what linguists call a *tracer word,* i.e., one that has outlived the item that it originally named but has remained in the language with an adapted meaning.

Another convention that puzzled young readers relates to the international aspects of the environmental movement. We had to go online to discover what was meant by the *Kyoto protocols* and also to check into what writers meant when they wrote something such as *beyond Copenhagen.* Miles were commonly translated into kilometers, as in the description that Bryan Walsh wrote of driving over the "4.2-mile-long (6.8 km) Great Belt Bridge" on his way to the island town of Lem in Denmark ("Gusty"). A similar kind of interruption takes place when temperatures are given in both Fahrenheit and Centigrade measurements so that readers have to mentally juggle the difference.

We also found authors dropping in foreign names and foreign phrases that, with a little help from us, students enjoyed connecting to English morphemes. For example, one news story told how "hot weather encourages hot heads" and increases the likelihood of *en masse* migrations, which could lead to civil unrest or even to wars. Because we live so close to Mexico, students were especially interested in a major feature article in the *Arizona Republic,* which told how Mexico City, now the third largest metropolis in the world, is sinking under all the weight, and how if something happens to either the *Remedios River* or to the *Emitter Canal,* large sections of the city will be flooded.

When the groups reported on their individual words, they used their mini-posters as visual aids that they displayed near our "recycling bin" folder.

From Morphemes to Words to Sentences

Probably the most valuable part of our word-study unit was teaching students how morphemes are the smallest parts of language that carry meaning. Bound morphemes have to be part of a word, as with the *e* that means "out of," as seen in such words as *effluvium, emissions, emit,* and *exit.* Free morphemes can either stand alone or work in tandem, as with *aqua,* which by itself names a color, but in combination with other morphemes can form such words as *aquamarine, aquarium, aqueduct,* and *aquifer.*

After we asked how many students remembered watching the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* when they were children, they decided that *morphology* was a grammatical term they could probably remember. And while looking at words changing forms isn't as much fun as looking at fantasy characters morph from one form to the other, they agreed that learning about morphemes and the concept of morphology is an efficient way to build vocabulary skills.

Our best in-class activity for teaching vocabulary words was dividing our class into small groups and asking each group leader to choose a morpheme printed on an oversize card from a big folder made to look like a recycling bin. The group's assignment was to "study" their morpheme and for each member to find a related word using the same morpheme and to figure out how to teach it to the rest of the class. At a minimum they were to prepare a mini-poster providing a basic definition and at least one illustrative sentence. To encourage careful reading, we said it was fine to copy sentences from the newspaper or magazine articles we had brought in, but they could also make up sentences based on what someone in the group knew or on what they could learn from classroom dictionaries or from other books in the room. And because we wanted them to understand how the meanings of words evolve, we said it was acceptable to include usages that were in the language before people began talking about sustainability; we also agreed they could change a singular word to plural or change the tense of a word.

When the groups reported on their individual words, they used their mini-posters as visual aids that they displayed near our "recycling bin" folder. After each group presentation, we talked a bit more about either the words the students had worked with or related words that we thought of. Our purpose was to provide additional experiences to help students remember both the basic meanings and the processes through which words change. For the word *carbon,* we even managed to bring in an old piece of carbon paper. See Figure 1 for some of the

FIGURE 1. Morphemes as Vocabulary Builders

MORPHEMES	WORDS	ILLUSTRATIVE SENTENCES
Bio = life	Biodegradable	Paper is *biodegradable,* but plastic is not.
	Biofuels	*Biofuels* derive from plant products.
	Biological	*Biological* warfare is a really scary concept.
	Biomass	Living organisms comprise a *biomass.*
	Biome	A *biome* names an ecological type, like a desert or a forest.
	Biominerals	*Biominerals* are designed to improve people's health.
	Bionics	Superman was one of the first *bionic* heroes.
	Biopsy	In a *biopsy,* a piece of body tissue receives careful examination.
	Biosphere	Scientists in Arizona built an artificial *biosphere.*
	Biotic	Living plants and animals cause *biotic* effects.
	Bioshock	*Bioshock* and *Biowave* are the names of new video games.
	Biowave	
Carbon = a natural element found in coal and petroleum	Black carbon	*Black carbon* is heavy soot from burning diesel and wood.
	Carbon cap-and-trade legislation	*Cap-and-trade* arrangements are a way of rationing how much carbon can be emitted into the atmosphere.
	Carbon copy	People used to use *carbon paper* to type duplicate copies.
	Carbon emissions	*Carbon emissions* contribute to pollution.
	Carbon footprint	Our *carbon footprint* is the pollution we leave behind.
	Carbon negative	Being *carbon negative* means not polluting.
Eco = habitat or environment	Eco-beauty	*Eco-beauty* refers to grooming with "natural" cosmetics.
	Ecocert	*Ecocert* relates to official standards for organic products.
	Eco-connections	There is no end to ways of making *eco-connections.*
	EcoDry Styler	The *EcoDry Styler* is a new hair drier.
	Eco-friendly	Many businesses claim to be *eco-friendly.*
	Eco-labels	Companies show their *eco-pride* through designing clever *eco-labels.*
	Eco-pride	
Enviro = surroundings	Enviro-minded	*Enviro-minded* consumers buy local produce.
	Environmental Awareness	A new level of *environmental awareness* has emerged around the world.
	Environmental Defense Fund	This *Defense Fund* spends money to protect the *environment.*
	Environmentalists	*Environmentalists* are activists interested in ecology.
Geo = Earth	Geocentric	An early *geocentric* idea hypothesized that the sun circles the earth.
	Geochemistry	Changes in the earth are studied in *geochemistry.*
	Geographer	A *geographer* researches different countries on the earth.
	Geologist	Many *geologists* work for the oil industry.
	Geometry	*Geometry* focuses on measuring things, including the earth.
	Geopolitics	Global warming has increased international *geopolitics.*
	Geothermal	*Geothermal* studies relate to the problems of global warming.
Logo = study or word	Biology	*Biology* studies living forms—animal or human.
	Climatologists	*Climatologists* specialize in studying what causes climates to change.
	Ecology	*Ecology* investigates our total environment.
	Glaciologist	Because glaciers are changing, *glaciologists* have more work to do than in earlier decades.
	Logical	Some sustainability arguments aren't very *logical.*

continued

FIGURE 1. Morphemes as Vocabulary Builders *(continued)*

Re = again	Recharge	It takes power to *recharge* batteries.
	Reciprocal	In a *reciprocal* agreement, people make trades.
	Reclamation	A *reclamation project* tries to repair ecological damage.
	Recycle	*Recycling* has to be done with knowledge and care.
	Refine	Much of the cost of gas comes through the *refining* process.
	Refuel	We *refuel* less often now that gas is so expensive.
	Regenerate	Once an area has been spoiled, it's hard to *regenerate* it.
	Rehabilitation	Sometimes, areas as well as people need *rehabilitation.*
	Reinflate	Scientists are trying to *reinflate* the soil under Mexico City.
	Remediate	In Mexico City, *Los Rios Remedios* is a river designed to *remediate* some of the water problems.
	Reverse	*Reverse boycotts* are a way to reward businesses that invest in ecology.

basic morphemes that our students worked with. We have provided additional examples and, for the sake of the chart, have also simplified most of the explanatory sentences.

With younger students, teachers might want to work with more obvious morphemes such as *aero* (aerate, aerial, aerobiology, aerodynamics, aerosol, and aerospace), *cycle* (a cyclist, bicycle, cyclical, cyclone, cyclotron, motorcycle, tricycle, weather cycle), *de-* (declassify, declining, decommission, decompose, deescalate, defile, deforest, deregulate), *fuel* (carbon fuels, fuel cell, fuel oil, to be fuel-dependent, to refuel, to fuel debate), and *-ject* (conjecture, inject, injection, project, projection, reject, rejection).

No doubt, the articles we used are archived online, but we think it would be best for classes to locate new articles, especially those relating to current events and to one's local area. For our group work, the local stories were the most popular choices, even though they were not the most dramatic. One summarized a weekend course offered by a community college and another reported on the celebration of Earth Day at the Biosphere, built in the desert between Phoenix and Tucson. Next was the article telling about the sinking of Mexico City, which, because we live so close to Mexico, we considered almost local. It was also the most dramatic, as it explained how Mexico City was originally built on an island in a lake, and now the pumping of water from beneath the old lakebed, combined with the weight of the city, is causing severe problems.

Sustainability makes a good language awareness topic because ecology promises to be a continuing discussion in both the media and in everyday life.

Sustainability makes a good language awareness topic because ecology promises to be a continuing discussion in both the media and in everyday life. And because the events and the conditions being reported on have never happened before, the language will continue to be new and interesting and will provide material for minilessons on the mixing and matching of morphemes, the use of metaphors and similes, and how creative writers and speakers employ metonymy to make allusions. Vocabulary specialists agree that one of the best approaches for developing a deep knowledge of words is to work repeatedly with a basic morpheme—whether a root or an affix—in a variety of contexts. Focusing on sustainability provides a natural way to return again and again to the same morphemes used in different manners, and fortunately the learning takes place without rote memorization, a methodology that has turned many teachers and students away from vocabulary study.

We organized our material into a two-week unit, but for classroom teachers who meet with the same students over longer periods of time, we recommend stretching the material over many minilessons, sort of an "article of the week" approach, where the students bring in articles to discuss. Advantages of this continuing study are that students will gain confidence in deciphering the meanings of words they have not previously encountered, they will learn creative and generative aspects of language, they will see how we now live in a mutually

dependent world, and, perhaps most importantly, they will connect what we do in school to what's happening in the world.

English teachers are currently under criticism for failing to help their students develop reading skills related to nonfiction, which is what adults (even those of us who consider ourselves book lovers) spend the most time reading or listening to. In light of this justifiable criticism, we believe that studying sustainability through news stories can be a win-win—or as we've seen in "sustainability talk," a *winnovation.*

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The ReadWriteThink.org Word Matrix Student Interactive allows students to explore the similarities and differences among words typically considered synonyms. With this tool, students can organize groups of words by connotation on one axis and by register on another. While the Word Matrix is a tool designed to assist teachers in vocabulary instruction, it can also help students clarify differences between seemingly similar words, explore the concept of diction in literary analysis, and practice word-choice precision in their writing. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/word-matrix-30071.html

Call for Entrants for the Secondary Section High School Teacher of Excellence Award

Each NCTE affiliate is at liberty to select a person for this honor in the manner of its choice. An affiliate's governing board might acknowledge someone who has previously won an award within the affiliate, thus moving that person's recognition to a national level, or the affiliate might advertise for applications for nominations before choosing a winner.

Deadline: Documentation should be sent to the Secondary Section Steering Committee administrator/designee by **May 1** of each year. Materials should be sent to the address on the current nomination form. More information and a complete list of the 2010 High School Teachers of Excellence Award recipients are available at www.ncte.org/second/awards/hste.

Mary Ellen Dakin, David Lowell Eatough, and Andrew Turchon

A Walk on the Wilder Side

An English teacher, biology teacher, and social studies teacher reflect on ways they have encouraged their students to learn more about the natural world.

Because of all that has been lost, we must begin again to see the wild in local and mundane environments—starting, perhaps, with the hopefulness in which we set out on our walks.

—*John Elder, Introduction to* Nature/Walking

The English classroom is home to some of the great classic and contemporary literary naturalists: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Loren Eiseley, Barry Lopez, Annie Dillard. Theirs is a prose of place, a world of words, an evocation—part field notes, part memory, part imagination—of land and seascapes that are, at best, faraway and foreign, somewhere *out there.* At worst, the wilderness from which they cry is "already gone or going under fast," as Abbey rages in *Desert Solitaire.* "This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial," he warns in the introduction to his 1968 book about the country around Moab in southeastern Utah. "You're holding a tombstone in your hands" (xiv).

We need to establish and nurture a relationship between urban and suburban students and the natural world. This relationship needs to be personal and immediate. They need to see the wilder life that survives and sometimes flourishes in *their* world—not miles away in the hills and mountains or hidden beneath the sea, but outside their windows, on their sidewalks and streets, perched on their telephone poles. "[T]his communion between species," writes Susan Hand Shetterly, has the potential not only to enrich but to save lives (240).

If there is hope for our planet in these days when scientists warn that we are on the verge of "an unprecedented human-caused ecological collapse" (Haupt 6), it will come from the personal connection that this generation of students can feel for wild life when they learn to observe it, wonder at it, and welcome it as a necessary part of their actual, everyday world. And in the act of paying deep attention to something wilder than themselves, they may discover the "genetic kinship" (Kligerman 78) that convinced Thoreau, "We are never alone" (89).

Yet in the disconnection of our separate buildings, content areas, and classrooms, teachers *are* too often alone. Educating the whole child is not a division of labor but a relay where the baton is handed off and handed back and at times held together. To build a relationship between students and the natural world that transcends boundaries, we need to establish a kinship with our colleagues in the natural and social sciences. In this article, an English teacher, a biology teacher, and a social studies teacher walk the overlapping terrain of their disciplines, searching for places where a shift in activity or perception might restore the ecological balance of authentic learning. In the cross-pollination that occurs (Nabhan 3–13), we find lost connections, mutually sustaining relationships, and hope.

The English Teacher: Spinning Webs

"OK, we're going for a walk," the English teacher said one day in complete exasperation. She had

written the word *nature* on the chalkboard and instructed her students in an urban high school to make a web, put *nature* in the center, and write 25 associations they had with this word (Kligerman 77). They had looked at her quizzically. They didn't understand.

It used to be enough to work through the syllabus chronologically, timing the study of "nature" and the Transcendentalists for early spring and hoping to inspire at least some of her students to converse with Thoreau, to consider what he has to say about economy and freedom, about solitude and society, about the ambiguous good that is technology, about Wildness and why we need it. But too many distractions now crowded together—the city in which she lived and taught had fallen into deeper poverty, the spring of the school year had devolved into the season of standardized tests, and somewhere in the recent past her students had become the Net generation, weaned on electronic text, instant messages, and virtual reality. The gap between word and world had widened at the time when contemporary environmental authors cry out for reconnection. The need to bring the pages of their tree-books[1] back to life felt more important than ever now.

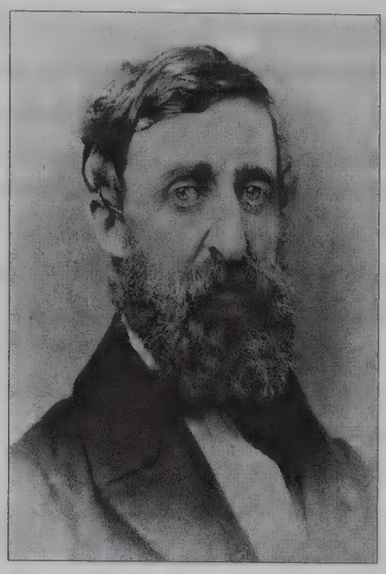


Photo of Henry David Thoreau, by George F. Parlow, 1861. From the Library of Congress.

Because the weather and the dean permitted it, they went outside. The school building, located beneath a flight path to Logan Airport in Boston and surrounded by asphalt, cement, and chain link, had a green space in the back with a scattering of oak, cherry, maple, birch, and pine. Inspired by a homework assignment devised by Anne McCrary Sullivan, the English teacher herded her group of high school juniors onto the green space and said, "There's nothing happening here, right?" They laughed in quizzical agreement. "Find a place by yourself where nothing is happening, sit there, look and listen for ten minutes, and write down everything that happens" (Sullivan 224). "I get it," Anthony proclaimed. "She's teaching us irony!"

And so it seemed, at first. Earphones and cell phones flamed up like brush fires to be put out; students swatted and scratched and complained. But eventually they began their first attempt at field notes. That night the teacher would read repeated references not to the sounds of insects, birds, and wind but to the white noise of urban life. She would see that they lack a vocabulary specific to the natural world, unable to name the types of trees, birds, insects, grasses, flowers, and weeds they observed (one student would write in outrage of a poor, defenseless tree—a birch—whose bark had been "splotted all over with white paint").

But the English teacher would also find signs of wide-awake attention to natural detail and the "web-like motions of the mind" (Sullivan 220) as it connects the dots of life. "Some clusters of pines remind me of fireworks," Sara wrote in her field notes, "with the needles shooting out in all directions. I'd almost rather not take notes and just simply observe," she continued. "When I look down to write, I feel like I miss everything that's happening around me."

Making Metaphors

The most striking lesson this English teacher learned that day is that the eyes and ears need educating. It is easier, as Lyanda Lynn Haupt points out in *Crow Planet: Essential Wisdom from the Urban Wilderness,* a book about the urban wilderness in Seattle, to see the majestic, the rare, and the profound in the wild. In cities, we must "work to see" (161). The second thing I learned (and I learn this over and over again) is the necessity of preparation, but the better half of preparation is a readiness for the unexpected, and this sometimes requires collaboration with colleagues outside our discipline. The scattering of good ideas I had gathered into lesson plans from my readings had been written by and for naturalists and college teachers. If I wanted students to walk at the wilder edges of our discipline, they would need more structure and support, and so would I. What skills of observation would they need? What tools? What essential questions? What rules? And when they returned, what would they find in their tree-books that would have been lost to them before?

Because these students had spent 30 minutes of English class outdoors on a day in spring, I asked them again to write 25 associations they have with nature. The source of this activity, an essay written by Jack Kligerman when he was teaching a nature seminar in the Bronx, makes frequent references to "all the old metaphors" (82) about nature but I wasn't sure what those metaphors were. So I followed up the web activity with a beginner's list of metaphors by which my students could classify the attitudes, assumptions, and biases that shape and potentially limit their relationship with nature (see fig. 1).

The metaphors visibly unsettled them. They looked down at their lists and struggled to discover any discernable relationship. They simply had not thought much about their relationship with "the more-than-human world" (Haupt 12). Focusing on the bottom line and their final self-assessment of where they stand in their relationship with the natural world, I asked for a show of hands—all but two viewed nature as "faraway." None thought of the natural world as home, even though we live in a city with almost three miles of Atlantic coastline and over 800 acres of marshland skirting the perimeter of an otherwise densely populated city. None saw our city as home to the wild in any sense other than wild parties, wild drivers, and wild neighborhoods.

If I wanted students to understand that life is a metaphor and that all earthly things are connected, we would need to begin with the earth at their feet.

"May I borrow some dead things?" I asked my colleague in the science department. He was happy to share.

FIGURE 1. A Walk on the Wilder Side

Nature

Write 25 associations you make with this word.

Do patterns emerge about your relationship with nature?

Which of these metaphors emerge?

Nature is escape—peaceful, pastoral, ideal, faraway

Nature is recreation—intense, adventurous, fun

Nature is mother—creative, nurturing, loving

Nature is property—purchased, used, consumed, sold

Nature is victim—attacked, polluted, suffering, dying

Nature is force—threatening, wild, indifferent

Nature is home—local, immediate, personal, needed

Faraway ⟷ Close

Where do you stand in your relationship with the natural world?

The Biology Teacher: Whaling

"Forget content area. What should all students learn about our role in nature?" the English teacher asked me one day. As a biologist—a lover of nature—first and a teacher of biology second, I answered my colleague's question with this: All students should learn that all of life is linked together in a vast, complex web. We only have a superficial understanding of the web's intricacies. They should know that our activities are destroying parts of this web before we know what role each plays in ecosystems and that it is entirely possible that this destruction will have negative effects on humanity. John Muir writes, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (245). This is wondrous and a bit frightening.

Urbanization and technology have resulted in a generation that has little interaction with nature. A chorus of environmental science teachers now voices the concern that, because of television and the Internet, students know more about zebras in the African savanna than squirrels in their backyards. There are some such as Richard Louv who believe that "nature deprivation disorder" is a serious problem and a contributing factor to the social ills that plague cities around the world. Biophilia—an innate appreciation for living things—has been diminished. It is essential that young people be exposed to the local wonders of nature, even if that nature is limited to plants and insects growing through cracks in an abandoned lot.

I start each year now with an activity that challenges students to develop the rich descriptions I expect to read in laboratory reports. The need for this grew out of the vague and superficial descrip-

tions students had been writing in science class of complex and, to my eye, beautiful structures. Students arrive in class to find similar objects on every desk. As they gather in small groups, I challenge each group to use every sense as they brainstorm a list of descriptive terms for the unidentified object before them. I move around the room encouraging students to push beyond the most obvious characteristics. After 20 minutes or so, each group is asked to describe its object. I prompt them with questions.

"Did anyone write down an odor?"

"It smells like pennies."

"Great! What could have caused it to smell that way? What mineral or elements smell that way?"

"Metal . . . sulfur . . . copper . . . salts . . ."

"We thought it smelled like the ocean."

"A match."

These words and others for texture, color, and shape are written on the board. At this point, students have not guessed the identity of the objects, although some have mentioned petrified wood due to the columnar shape. Before the bell rings, I arrange the objects horizontally, from largest to smallest, on a desk where all can see them. Most students are now able to identify the whole collection of objects as very large, fossilized, whale vertebrae. If the class started with, "Hey, Mister. What's that?" and I answered, "These are fossilized whale vertebrae," the experience would not have been as valuable. Naming things can terminate inquiry. So can facts. It is not surprising that many students become disenfranchised with the study of the natural world at an early age. I've always valued the process of science more than the product. The questions are frequently more exciting than the answers. Questions are the engines that drive science.

So too is the act of observing, but there are no magic formulas a science teacher can share with English teachers about this. Learning how to filter information—visual, acoustic, and olfactory nonsense that does not advance understanding—is difficult. Learning how to express what we observe takes even more time. Have you ever tried to describe a smell? Bacon smells like . . . bacon. What the teacher considers obvious seldom is. Learning how to see, hear, smell, and describe takes time, patience, and practice.

The English Teacher: Resurrecting the Dead

Remembering how students had reverted to the most general nouns—*tree, bug, bird*—to name the plants and insects they saw in the green space behind the school, I asked the biology teacher to name the specimens as he gently packed each one into a plastic crate for transport to the English classroom. "Knowing terminology is overrated," he said. "Anyone who has ever asked 'why' can grow frustrated with the language of science." This comment was both a relief—I didn't have to relearn genus and species—and a surprise. It isn't the nouns and declaratives that matter most after all; it's the adjectives and the interrogatives.

The next day in English class, each student would choose a specimen and wonder briefly at its place in the family of living things. Then, I wanted students to observe their wild thing with purpose, patience, and some degree of skill. I wanted them to bring their five senses to the task of seeing something resurrected from the marsh, the beach, and the vacant lots of our city as from a living grave, come back to tell the story of a brief and wild life. I hoped that, as the great naturalists tell us, a full engagement of the five senses would inspire and inform the sixth.

The students and I chose our specimens—sea urchins, mouse skeletons, bird skulls, a dog's skull, tiny eggs, star fish, snake skins, a severed wing—and with eager trepidation returned to our desks to observe. The room filled with the music of conversation. Marissa had chosen to study a bird's wing, the only remains of a red-winged blackbird that Mr. Eatough had recently found at the marsh. Her notes are filled with the imagery of color and texture, interspersed with expressions of empathy. With an organic simile she describes the wing as "shaped like half of a heart."

Have you ever tried to describe a smell? Bacon smells like . . . bacon. Learning how to see, hear, smell, and describe takes time, patience, and practice.

Another student, whose feelings for animals made it painful for her to handle the dead, chose instead to examine leaves she had collected behind the school. She called me over to her desk, held up

a large green maple leaf to the sun alongside her open palm, and said, "Look at the resemblance!" She wrote in her notes, "The veins in a single leaf resemble those of the human machine, and each is beautiful." Perhaps coincidentally, Charles Darwin's first sketch of the tree of life, found in his original notebooks, also resembles the vessels in a leaf and the creases in a human hand.

Before returning to literature, I wanted to test the claim of authors who write movingly and convincingly of their own transformative experiences in nature, of looking so closely at the external world that they simultaneously lose and find themselves. So on the third day, I began with a freewrite to an essential question: "Yesterday you observed the remains of a wild creature, a resident of Revere, a neighbor. What is the effect of close observation on the observer?" Sara framed the experience as a journey that compresses and expands: "In our society, we are extremely focused on the big picture, struggling to keep things in perspective by remembering the past, living in the present, and worrying about the future. But with close observation, there is none of that. You're just *in it.* Completely immersed in something seemingly as insignificant as a moth or a mouse. It grounds us. We lose ourselves in that moment. We see the beauty in everything."

Sara's reflection was typical of the whole group's responses: close observation of a once-living wild thing provokes perception, imagination, and empathy. Though at first a roomful of urban adolescents laughed and chattered over feathers, fur, and bone, at some point in the process most connected on a personal level, and some caught glimpses of themselves in their genetic kin. The modern claim that all life on earth may have originated from a single cell (Thomas 5) can be traced back to Darwin, who closes *On the Origin of Species* with a single, summative, breathtaking sentence: "There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved" (419).

How different our disciplines are—English language arts and the natural and social sciences—and yet how symbiotic. In observing the biology teacher's dead things, in writing field notes, and in reflecting on the effect of observing on the observer, my students wandered down two paths—the naturalist's and the writer's—to arrive at the place Annie Dillard sees as literature's realm, "the imagination's vision, and the imagination's hearing—and the moral sense, and the intellect" (17).

On returning to our tree-books, we read Virginia Woolf's "Death of the Moth," "Seeing" from Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* Emerson's "Nature," and selected chapters from Thoreau's *Walden.* We collected quotations like seashells from each source and gathered them into a basket of epigraphs. In the closing weeks of school, after the last petals of tree blossoms and sheaves of standardized tests had fluttered to the ground, we prepared for two events: the composing of an essay of observation and a field trip to Walden Woods in Concord, Massachusetts, 20 miles west as the crow flies, somewhere out there, faraway and foreign.

The Social Studies Teacher: Wandering the Wild

Absolute Location: 40°N, 105°W

Elevation: 9,500 feet above sea level

Nearest town: Estes Park, Colorado (18 miles away)

Destination: Glacier Gorge

Springing from my one-person nylon shelter, I'm greeted by the chilly morning air and the anticipation of my first sip of bubbling-hot tea. From a spruce-forested corner of this primitive park, the snow- and granite-covered monoliths spread out in all directions across a morning horizon as far as I can see. From underneath my down sleeping bag peaks the laminated map of Rocky Mountain National Park, as if I'd dreamt the miles of today's adventure before they'd even transpired, hatched from my own imagination, experience, and wanderlust. I plan my route through Glacier Gorge, a 3.5-mile-long valley of wild land, dotted by majestic lakes and distinctively carved by thousands of years of glaciation.

I need the remote, the mysterious, the uncertain, the wild, but I also need to teach 21st-century students that wilderness is essential even if they never venture into the mountains or plunge into

canyons beyond where the pavement ends and the backcountry begins. As a social studies teacher, I can contribute a few concepts and activities to the conversation of colleagues in English and science departments that revolve around reading maps analytically and developing the skills of "geoliteracy."

Knowing Where

"What observation skills can we harness as student geographers to better understand how to read a variety of maps and to better understand the importance of 'where' in geography?" I ask the students in social studies in early September.

Reading a map can be a daunting task, especially in an age of digital technology and GPS where people too often rely on technology to point them in the right direction. After students have learned the principle components of a map—the compass rose, latitude and longitude, and key—and have begun to build a working knowledge of how to apply these in locating the relative and absolute location of actual places, I teach students that all maps, like all texts, have a purpose. In most cases, a map's title will shed light not only on the map's subject—the physical place that it represents—but also on its purpose. Reading a map, or any text, to discern the authors' primary (and at times, secondary) purposes is a challenge that requires close reading of verbal and graphic clues, and teaching adolescents these skills requires structured, cooperative learning.

I seat students in groups of four and distribute a medley of maps that I've collected over the years. On the board is a list of verbs: *inform, explain, persuade,* and *compare and contrast,* the umbrella under which most maps fall as far as purpose. My students' objective: to classify each map under one or more of the verbs on our "purpose" list. Using their fundamental knowledge of maps, students provide evidence in the form of concrete details from the map to support their claims of their map's purpose—a symbol from the key, a phrase from the title, a fact extrapolated from inside of the map.

"Does anyone have a map that informs?" I pipe in as I quietly walk from group to group.

"This map informs me that Greenland is really, really big," Natalia says, as her group members nod in agreement.

"Does anyone have a map that explains?" I ask.

"This map explains how Christopher Columbus came to North America in 1492," Brian proclaims.

"Does anyone have a map that persuades?" I ask last of all.

Among the maps, I have planted a tourist map framed with ads for local eateries, shops, and attractions, but students struggle to see this as an attempt to persuade them to visit a place and spend lots of money. Another map, Jesse Levine's 1982 turnabout map, is a traditional map of North and South America in almost every sense except one—the two continents, though not the words, are upside-down. At first students see this as a mistake but when they learn that it is a deliberate choice on the part of the mapmaker, I challenge them to wonder why. "How does this map try to persuade you to see the world?" I ask my students. "Does this map give you a new perspective?"

Reading a map, or any text, to discern the authors' primary (and at times, secondary) purposes is a challenge that requires close reading of verbal and graphic clues, and teaching adolescents these skills requires structured, cooperative learning.

By the end of the class period, students have classified all of their maps into one or more of the categories and hopefully prompted some debate over primary and secondary purpose. This activity is one way to encourage students to look closely and think analytically about the world and the ways in which it is represented, and to achieve objectives that all teachers, no matter their content area, have for their students.

For as long a time as humans have lived together in permanent agricultural communities, there has existed a need to map the land. For early humans, knowledge of "where" was as biologically primal as the need for food and water; it was their means to survival. Except for those who do wander in wild places, this knowledge no longer seems vital in our tech-savvy world and, as a result, it isn't held in the same regard as it once was. However, knowledge of the "where" is critical to developing a relationship between 21st-century students and the natural world.

Teaching Geoliteracy

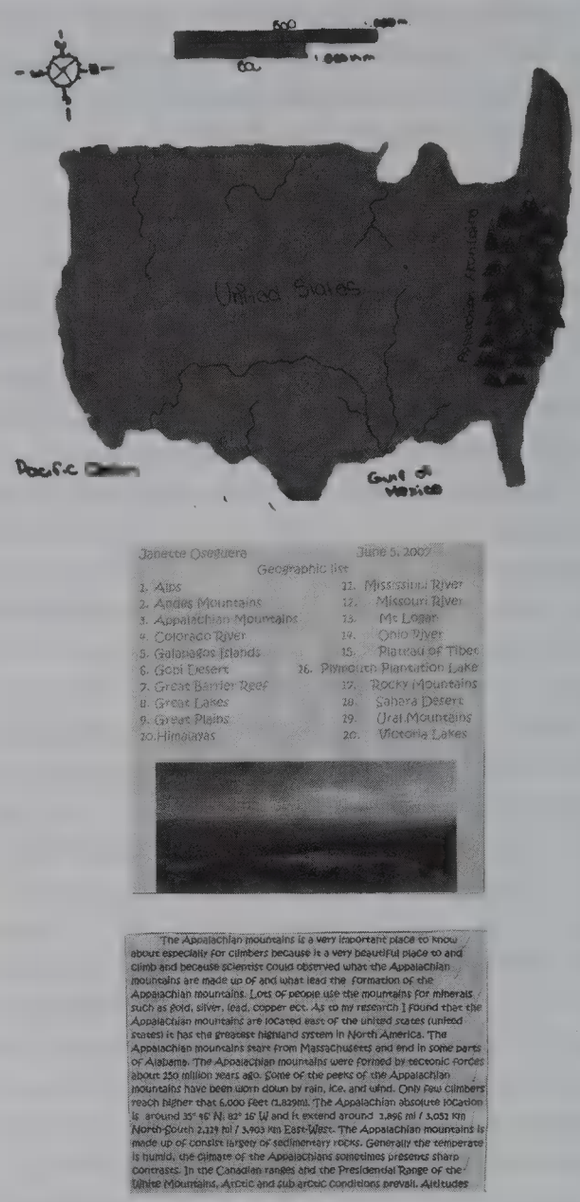
"What places on this planet—wild, naturally occurring places not made by human beings—should *all* students know about?" I ask the students in social studies in late spring. By now they have spent the better part of a year investigating each continent, region by region, and have acquired a working vocabulary of the earth's general physical features: mountains, glaciers, deserts, plains, forests, plateaus, oceans, seas, lakes, and rivers.

For this activity, students leaf through a variety of maps, including atlases and Google Earth, to create an alphabetized list of 10 to 20 specific, natural places. Selection criteria are based on the students' determination of what places they believe *all* students should be familiar with—the Aral Sea, Crater Lake, the Gobi Desert—and consequently have inventoried in their mental maps. Beside each place on their list, students write a one-sentence statement explaining *why* it made their list. My students always enjoy this activity because it encourages them to assume the role of geographer and cartographer as they think both spatially and globally across countries and continents and practice a perspective that is critical to all students, but perhaps most critical to students in high-poverty, urban districts. Students who don't learn to see the world outside of their own city will rarely seek to journey outside of it.

Once their lists are completed, students select one place that they most wonder about and would consider traveling to someday: so begins the research component. The research phase focuses on location, physical description, history, and human-environmental-interaction (HEI, the ways in which humans depend on, modify, and adapt to their environment), along with a more substantiated explanation for why this special place tops their list. In addition, students create and color their own map based on at least two different maps that they have referenced in the process. By creating a map of their own, they learn to synthesize geographic information from a variety of sources and create a map with a purpose that is altogether their own—hopefully, to convince other students that they should be geographically familiar with the place featured on their map (see fig. 2).

Opening a map is like opening a book, and opening a book and finding a map is an invitation to adventure. Both contain words and each includes directions—a table of contents and page numbers in the book, a compass rose and coordinates of latitude and longitude on a map. Both tell stories—some written down, some spoken aloud and shared, some suggested but untold. Books are adventures of the mind and so too are maps when we read them far from the territory they represent. Books have the power to inspire action and maps to direct it, but *you* are your own author and the mysterious, remote, and wild landscape is the paper upon which you compose your own adventure.

FIGURE 2. A Walk on the Wilder Side



The English Teacher: Seeing the Local Wild

"'I have traveled a good deal in _____' now fill in the blank," I ask students in English class,

most of whom had never caught Thoreau's sweet irony—"I have traveled a good deal in Concord" (2).

"Did anyone fill in the blank with 'Revere'?" They roll their eyes. "Did anyone fill in the blank with 'myself'?" They don't understand.

"*After* we go on our field trip, you're going to map yourself and compose a letter across time to Henry David Thoreau. (These assignments can be viewed at http://www.revereps.mec.edu/wilderside.html.) *Before* we go, your final composition is to write an essay or photo-essay on truly seeing something in nature, something local, something right outside your window or down the street or at the marsh or the beach or in the sky above your head, for the first time." I ask the students to reflect on the experience as the great naturalists do and to share what they have learned about the world, themselves, and their relationship to nature. As an example, I read to them an essay I had written on seeing purple ocean for the first time.

Students would write about seeing, with almost all their senses: anthills in the sidewalk's cracks, tree bark, a snail making silver tracks, a nest of baby skunks beneath a porch, and more. Theresa composed a scrapbook of 36 photographs accompanied with captions of growing up near Short Beach, of learning to count with seashells, and of observing the life that teems in tide pools. Then beneath a photo of a car engine half-buried in the sand, she wrote, "But now, new trash washes daily to shore." Her photo-essay reads like Rachel Carson's fable for tomorrow.

The Biology Teacher: Questioning Science

E. O. Wilson, a Harvard professor who lives near Walden Woods, wrote "A Letter to Thoreau" as the prologue to his book, *The Future of Life.* He begins, "Henry! May I call you by your Christian name?" (xi). I can imagine Wilson and Thoreau sharing a drink and discussing what has become of Thoreau's woods and life on earth since Thoreau's passing. I once had students write a letter to Thoreau discussing humanity's impact on the planet.

But in recent years I have made changes to the assignment. Now the students imagine attending a conference of famous environmentalists who, as a result of a warp in the space-time continuum, have come together to discuss the current condition of our planet. Despite nearly heroic attempts to find out what these famous environmentalists have to say about the state of the earth and how best to ensure a healthy planet for future generations, the crowds that surround them make it impossible for my students to get an interview. Being clever students, they volunteer to guide the famous environmentalists on a nature walk that coincides with National Biodiversity Day. As they walk through a local park and observe the negative impact of invasive species on the ecosystem, the students clear their throats and ask the following:

Is There Hope for the Environment Now?

The task is to do extensive research on at least two people who have played a significant role in shaping global environmental history. They can be living or deceased. Plan the interview. Write at least 15 questions you would like the environmentalists to respond to. The questions should be roughly divided into those that assess the current environmental status and those that offer suggestions for changing the path we are currently on, if change is deemed necessary. What makes a good question? Questions that are too broad or that cannot be answered by data are of limited value to scientists. After designing the questions, research possible answers. The questions and responses, prefaced with brief biographies of the environmentalists, will form the basis of a paper.

At the heart of all environmental issues is an individual's worldview. How does a person perceive nature and humanity's niche within it? Where do students and educators stand along the spectrum between anthropocentric (self- or human-centered) and biocentric (earth-centered)? Are we a part of nature or apart from it? Stewardship, the protection of vital environmental resources, depends on the ability to see life in the wilderness and in the sidewalk cracks, in pristine coral reefs and degraded salt marshes.

Seeing life takes practice, patience, and conversation with colleagues across disciplines and with those wise observers from the past, present, and future.

The English Teacher: Walking Home

"Though the view from our doors is more contracted than that from your cabin," I explain to my imaginary friend as we walk toward the green space behind the school, "there is pasture enough for our imagination" (Thoreau 57).

He glances at me enigmatically. I wonder what he sees. Is he able to focus on the natural in our urban world as we hope our students will? Can he celebrate the tenacity, resilience, and adaptability of the organisms in our ecosystem and of the students in the city we call home? Or will the poverty we have so recklessly cultivated in the 150 years since Thoreau's death drive him, drive us all, to despair?

Just then from a jet-streaked sky, a red-winged blackbird glides to the ground, his red and gold epaulets brave in the bright June sun. We catch our breath and continue on our walk, advancing a bit more hopefully in the direction of our dreams.

Note

1. Defined in the Urban Dictionary as "a book printed on dead trees, i.e. paper, as opposed to an e-book, which only exists electronically."

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Color of Silence: Sensory Imagery in Pat Mora's Poem 'Echoes'" invites students to explore how writers use sensory imagery as a literary device to make text more meaningful. Students begin by using all of their senses to describe known objects such as pasta, chocolate, or grapes. Students first feel and listen to the object, in a bag, before taking it out of the bag to look at, smell, and taste it. They then use at least three senses to write a poem about the object they've described. Next, they evaluate how this literary device functions in Pat Mora's poem "Echoes." Finally, students think about how sensory images work in their own poems and then make appropriate revisions to their work. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/color-silence-sensory-imagery-1104.html

Rachel Mazor

A Garden of Stories: An English Lesson in a Botanical Garden

A trip to the Shakespeare Garden in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden helps students better understand connections between nature, life, and literature.

On a cold, crisp February day, five middle school teachers are among the few people wandering around the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, squinting at labels describing the plants that will bloom soon. We are on a reconnaissance mission, trying to plan an interdisciplinary field trip for the seventh grade. We represent different departments—science, math, art, music, and English—and we are charged with the task of finding ways to connect this visit to all of our curricula. We brainstorm lesson ideas, keeping in mind our ulterior motive: to give these city kids a day of green.

Connecting with the Plant Kingdom

A tree or two may grow in Brooklyn, but our borough is more commonly associated with the drab hues of brownstone buildings and the stony gray of the Brooklyn Bridge. On a typical day, the only plants kids at our school will see may be the stiff mixed bouquets displayed outside a bodega, perhaps complemented by an herb pot on the windowsill of a determined indoor gardener. Our students, as bright and curious and environmentally aware as they are, do not get much opportunity to spend quality time in the plant kingdom, aside from the representatives who make it onto the cafeteria's salad bar. Even then, they have little sense of how this green matter connects to the earth.

I remember reeling after a lively yet troubling discussion with some students about why tomatoes could not be gathered into "sheaves," one of their vocabulary words. I realized that my students' error came not from a misunderstanding of the definition of a "sheaf" but rather from their ignorance of how, exactly, tomato plants grow. Many of them had never seen a tomato plant, with its snaking vines propped up in a wire cage, though most likely they had heard of tomatoes advertised as "vine-ripened." When I then referred to tomatoes coming from the earth, they were confused. "I thought you said they grew on vines," they protested, unable to generate a mental image of tomatoes hanging from vines that grow up and out of the ground.

This may be an extreme example, I realize. Plenty of our students spend their summers camping in the woods or help their parents in the small backyard gardens that lured so many of us from Manhattan to Brooklyn. Certainly, many of the students had not only seen tomatoes growing on vines, they had also enjoyed the unique pleasure of biting into a fresh-picked tomato, still warm from the sun and dusty from the soil. What saddens me, however, is that not all students have these experiences as part of their repertoire of memories. Children growing up in the city have so many opportunities to learn about all different kinds of people, yet many of them don't know nearly as much about the millions of other species that populate our planet—even the many other species that inhabit the city as well.

This sense of alienation from the earth is by no means unique to urbanites, though it seems to be a growing trend in this country. Barbara Kingsolver addresses this concern in her food memoir, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* (Harper, 2007). She suggests that a nation of children raised to believe that tangerines are born in wooden crates and asparagus

Rebecca Bullene, courtesy of Brooklyn Botanic Garden (bbg.org).

grows year-round would naturally find it increasingly acceptable to disbelieve in the well-established theory of evolution. She writes,

> In the past, principles of natural selection and change over time made sense to kids who'd watched it all unfold. Whether or not they knew the terms, farm families understood the processes . . . [of] culling, selecting, and improving their herds and crops. For modern kids who intuitively believe in the spontaneous generation of fruits and vegetables in the produce section, trying to get their minds around the slow speciation of the plant kingdom may be a stretch. (11)

Like Kingsolver, I wonder how students make sense of a world in which food has nothing to do with plants, in which the word *dirt* conjures up associations of filth rather than fertility, in which vine-ripened tomatoes somehow appear in stores free of previous relationships to vines or to the earth itself.

And so I, along with my colleagues, found it necessary to take our students to a green place. We knew they needed to see things growing from the ground up, breathe in the scent of still-living plants, touch leaves and branches and get some dirt—real dirt, not just dirtiness—under their fingernails. Though the stated goals of our trip may have been interdisciplinary, we knew the true purpose served a single discipline: we were all teaching Nature.

Lessons in Nature

After a bleak run of rainy days, the sun welcomes us brightly to the Botanic Garden. Who knew, when we planned this journey so many weeks ago, that we'd choose the most beautiful day of the year, the first *real* day of Spring (never mind the calendar), to bring students to this verdant place? The kids are tingling with visible excitement as we enter the garden. They bounce down the paths, past the wide expanses of manicured lawns and the not-quite-budding rosebushes. One student gazes longingly at a knotty tree trunk: "There's nowhere to climb trees in Brooklyn," she complains, and resolves to ask her parents to take her to Harriman State Park that weekend. The students are divided into groups and rotate through different areas of the garden. The math teacher helps the students find Fibonacci

Rebecca Bullene, courtesy of Brooklyn Botanic Garden (bbg.org).

sequences in pinecones and flower petals; the science and history teachers teach a lesson about medicinal plants in the native flora garden; the French and art teachers discuss Impressionism as the students sketch water lilies in the pond.

My lesson, appropriately enough, takes place in the Shakespeare garden. I start by pointing out the features of the garden itself: a cozy, enclosed space planted with flowers and herbs typical of a Renaissance English garden, paired with appropriate quotations from Shakespeare's poems and plays. A plaque featuring lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is positioned near the woodbine and musk-roses; a rosemary bush is coupled with Ophelia's words about remembrance.

We settle down and I lead the students in a discussion of one of Shakespeare's most well-known floral metaphors: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (*Romeo and Juliet,* 2.2.46–47). The students, who have just finished reading the tragedy, analyze Juliet's choice of analogy. Why, I ask them, does Juliet compare Romeo to a rose, rather than to a daisy, a sprig of mint, or even perfume? The students describe a rose and come to see why it is an apt symbol; with its fragrant, delicate petals, deep color, and sharp thorns, a rose represents the conflicting emotions Juliet experiences—the tender newness of her love, the strength of her attraction, the danger inherent in loving a Montague. I then send them off to examine other plants in the garden, to find their plants' "personalities" and create metaphors around them. Students come back with descriptions of sinister vines snaking around helpless old tree trunks, eager yellow flowers bursting with excitement and youth, confused plants that can't decide what they want to be—much like the seventh graders themselves.

They are learning about figurative language, coming to see how an inanimate object can somehow convey human traits. They are also learning about Shakespeare's love of nature, his keen awareness of the role plants play in our lives. More than that, however, they are learning that the natural world is full of beauty and strength, intrigue and passion, drama and discovery—just like literature. There are stories in the green parts of our world, and a master storyteller such as Shakespeare knows how to find these stories and share them with the rest of us. Drama and poetry don't simply exist inside our minds; they are a part of the world around us, and it is incumbent upon us to preserve and protect these stories. We need green spaces for the same reason we need books—for the stories they tell.

The seventh graders can't articulate these ideas, but they know that they are in a place of nature and of beauty. Their eyes are wide as they look closely at the plants; they crane their necks to scan the horizon, with trees and bushes as far as they can

FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY'S ELIZABETHAN GARDEN

The garden includes herbs and plants mentioned in Shakespeare's plays as well as those that were popular in his time, including lavender, creeping thyme, and English ivy. It includes a knot garden as well as flowerbeds, trees, hedges, and benches. It is surrounded by eight statues by American sculptor Greg Wyatt, each inspired by the characters and themes of a Shakespeare play. The garden is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Docents offer free tours the first and third Saturday at 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. between April and October. An audio tour is also available. Learn more at http://www.folger.edu/garden. Photo courtesy Folger Shakespeare Library.

Rebecca Bullene, courtesy of Brooklyn Botanic Garden (bbg.org).

see. As a Quaker school, we devote part of our trip to a silent Meeting for Worship by the Japanese garden; in the silence, students take in the sounds of birds calling to one another and wind shaking the tree branches. Afterward, they are allowed to play freely on the Cherry Esplanade. Some choose to run, whooping exuberantly, taking advantage of a rare chance to fill the open air with sound. Others remove their shoes and feel the grass between their toes; they sit against the trees and let their eyes take in the green before them.

The next day, we return to classes inside the school building. Juliet's rose is once again a mere name, printed on the page of a tattered Folger edition, and seems far removed from the rosebush climbing the trellis in the Shakespeare garden. In their minds, however, the students can travel back to that rosebush, to the woodbine and rosemary. They have seen and touched and smelled the plants; they can imagine Shakespeare doing the same as he composes his famous lines. They have found the stories in the garden.

Rachel Mazor teaches middle school and upper school English at the Brooklyn Friends School, a Quaker school in downtown Brooklyn, New York. This is her fifth year teaching at BFS; previously, she taught at other New York City independent schools. She studied comparative literature at Columbia University and received her MA from Bank Street College of Education. Rachel is also a proud member of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. She can be reached at rmazor@brooklynfriends.org.

READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Creative Communication Frames: Discovering Similarities between Writing and Art," graphic organizers assist in the development of comparative vocabulary and generate discussions of analogy and metaphor in art, as students go on a real or virtual tour of an art gallery. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/creative-communication-frames-discovering-10.html

Elizabeth Brockman, Marcy Taylor, Melinda Kreth, and MaryAnn K. Crawford

What Do Professors Really Say about College Writing?

In a follow-up to their previous English Journal *article, the authors report on focus-group discussions about writing in which college teachers from across the curriculum participated. Implications for the teaching of writing are described.*

In our January 2010 *English Journal* article, "Helping Students Cross the Threshold: Implications from a University Writing Assessment," we showcase results of a large-scale writing assessment conducted at Central Michigan University (Brockman, Taylor, Crawford, and Kreth), arguing that some of these results are especially relevant to English teachers working with college-bound students and sharing classroom implications, such as writing assignments, textbook suggestions, and "writing principles" (Atwell). As a follow-up to that article, we here narrow our teacherly gaze from overall assessment results and implications to just one segment: the faculty focus-group discussions. In these focus-group discussions, faculty representing various disciplines, experience levels, and pedagogical views shared their views with us about college writing, including writing assignments, "good" writing, and pedagogical strategies—all topics English teachers routinely discuss in various professional settings, such as NCTE conferences, NWP institutes, and state workshops.

These focus groups, however, extend our current professional conversations because participants were professors across disciplines talking informally among themselves about college writing. Their academic shoptalk provides a dialogue to which most *EJ* readers do not have access, but in which they are very interested. In sharing their comments here, we strive to promote not automatic acceptance of them but, instead, teacherly reflection, further assessment, and ongoing conversation about what our colleagues across disciplines say about student writing.

How We Gathered Faculty Responses

To provide a context for the faculty responses, we begin with a thumbnail sketch of our research methodology, with emphasis on the focus-group discussions. We began with questions: (1) How much and what kinds of writing do faculty assign? (2) What do faculty perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of their students' writing? (3) What disciplinary preferences exist among faculty with respect to what they believe counts for "good" writing? (4) What pedagogical strategies, if any, do faculty use in helping their students become better writers?

After indentifying the questions, we distributed a universitywide survey addressing the four questions and inviting faculty to participate in the focus-group interviews as a follow-up to the survey. Once survey results were obtained, we contacted the faculty who had expressed interest in the focus-group discussions, and 14 faculty volunteered and participated, including representatives from five of our six colleges: Business Administration, Communication and Fine Arts, Education and Human Services, Health Professions, and Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Focus-group participants, each of whom self-identified as interested in writing and the teaching of writing, were divided into three focus groups: six in the first group and four in the second and third groups. Each focus-group discussion lasted approximately one hour,

and all four researchers were present for each interview. With faculty permission, we tape-recorded the questions and responses, producing over 50 pages of transcribed text for analysis.

Focus Groups Reponses: What Participants Said about Writing

Our faculty participants shared a view of writing as developmental, and they commented on their strategies for encouraging growth over a student's college career. They also revealed the disciplinary differences that cause definitions of "good writing" to vary. Still, it is clear that regardless of discipline, the faculty participants in our study valued a kind of complexity of thought that first-year college students usually have not yet developed. Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue call this "difficulty" (1) while Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein refer to it as "tying it all together" (17). According to Graff and Birkenstein, the complexity of thought is a combination of "connection and coherence" and the art of metacommentary (17, 99–123). In looking at the focus-group comments in three overlapping categories—Writing Assignments, Reading and Managing Source Material, and Learning to Write—we see this theme of *complexity* playing out in relation to the following topics: the importance of reading, the value of summary and critique, the role of managing source materials, and the need for taking intellectual risks.

EJ readers may be interested to learn that not one professor mentioned five-paragraph essays or "traditional" high school research papers in the focus-group discussions as essential in college writing.

What Did Participants Say about Writing Assignments?

EJ readers may be interested to learn that not one professor mentioned five-paragraph essays or "traditional" high school research papers in the focus-group discussions as essential in college writing. Not as a standard academic form. Not as a stepping stone. Not as an organizational strategy. Although our survey results suggest that an in-class essay is the most common writing requirement at our institution, two of the most common writing assignments (that is, writing that is generated outside of class over some period of time) are critical analyses and research-based writing. Focus-group comments reinforce this view and extend it in two ways: the importance of intellectual risk taking and disciplinary difference.

Writing Assignments

> Assignments that ask people to—in their own words—to lay out an author's argument, to describe a piece of writing, to somehow boil it down into a couple pages—that's just an essential kind of thing, and [students] have to be able to do it, and it's one of the things I try to do.

> [I assign] one- to two-page written essays for every class meeting and [it's] always on the reading assignment [for the day]. And I start off with simple things, like summaries, because students can't do that.

> I [assign] two book reviews. Well, I call them "book critiques."

> Three times during the semester they have to turn in article critiques of the assigned reading. I just tell them I want three paragraphs—one paragraph of content (brief), one paragraph of why this article is important to the profession, and one paragraph on what they think of the article (their comments on the article).

> They're reviewing eight articles the first time, six the second time, and five the third, so they really have to do a lot within that assignment.

> I just say, "Pick a concept, an idea, or even facts that we have dealt with in class, and talk about its connection with this [or that] author's ideas."

Intellectual Risks

> I see that in all my classes [students saying], "We're not going to think, and we're not going to think anything different. Just tell us what we need to know and we'll try to do that."

> If students are trying to write their paper the night before it's due, or at two o'clock in the morning, it's really difficult to get them to think. Many times I read a paper thinking, "This person knew exactly what they wanted to talk about but they were either in a rush or they just couldn't put everything together."

> Many—not all—but most of my students tell me that to them this [class] is a hoop to be jumped through so they can graduate and someday go out and be a real social worker, and that being a social worker doesn't start until one graduates and gets a job. So the classroom is not seen quite so much as being [a place for] a social worker in training.

> I offer to read them [i.e., preliminary drafts]—I've had one or two that have turned in drafts and asked me to look them over first. But they seem to think that I should give them an "A" [just because they turned papers in for review.]

Disciplinary Differences

> One of the things that I notice is that students do not have a sense that there are differences, that writing expectations are going to be different for different disciplines.

> I wouldn't have structured the class quite the way I did if I had realized I was going to have as many students outside of the discipline.

Summary

The focus group comments extend survey responses in which faculty indicated that they commonly assign critical responses and other research-based writing. First, the focus-group comments suggest that college writing asks students to read and write about previously unfamiliar topics as a way to learn course content. Though we know from our work outside the English department and across campus that students may have a choice in topic selection, topics tend not to reflect or explore personal beliefs, views, or opinions—except as they pertain to the course concepts or the discipline in question. Second, faculty comments suggest that professors value intellectual risk taking. As such, they want students to use writing assignments as venues to explore complex questions or issues and, most importantly, to challenge themselves intellectually when they write.

As a field, we naturally value—and will continue to value—a wide range of writing assignments and genres: everything from stories, poems, and memoirs to newsletters, résumés, press releases, and, more recently, digital stories, blogs, and wikis. However, focus-group comments remind *EJ* readers that we should reflect thoughtfully about and not underestimate the value of summary and critique, especially as a writing-to-learn strategy, because they challenge students to tackle complex intellectual tasks and take intellectual risks with previously unknown topics, concepts, and genres.

Because preservice teachers at our institution sometimes dismiss summary as "boring," a task requiring no creativity and little effort other than regurgitation, we propose here that summary is more accurately characterized as complex, recursive, and even an act of discovery. Indeed, a summary requires a close and accurate reading, including the ability to discern the author's main point and then to relay that point objectively and fair-mindedly either (a) to report precisely the author's content or (b) to foreground key elements as background for a subsequent argument (see Graff and Birkenstein for a discussion of two kinds of summaries [28–38]). *EJ* readers know that critiques can take many different shapes and forms; however, college professors tend to favor critiques promoting complex analyses and intellectual risk taking. To promote such complexity, instead of asking students to critique the print and film versions of a literary work by describing three differences between them, *EJ* readers might prompt students to delve deeper by critiquing a single difference, determining how that difference significantly influences the narrative progression, especially conflict resolution. The latter task calls for a more rhetorically complex critique that would challenge students to take intellectual risks.

What Did Participants Say about the Importance of Reading and Managing Sources?

Faculty at our institution generally agreed that the purpose behind most writing assignments is to help students learn class concepts and, further, that assignments either foster or require an ability to read, understand, and manage source materials. Consider the following comments as further evidence for these important writing skills.

Understanding Citation Style

> What I usually do is I let them use MLA style in the 100-level classes because most [of my students] are not [Sociology] majors.

> What I'll typically do is to try to explain to them why we use Chicago Style in history. And then I lay down the law and say, "This is what we do in this class."
>
> I use APA style, which is standard for social work.
>
> Every student that comes to take my Intro to Recreation class now receives [a] handbook [about writing guidelines]—that and we use APA style. We just agreed on that across the department, [that] everyone's going to use the same style.

Finding and Evaluating Sources

> A lot of students say, "Well sure, I know how to research it at the library," but they really don't.
>
> To most students, secondary research means that you go collect a bunch of stuff and put it together.
>
> Students have little sense of the difference between a magazine and a journal or, now, things that they can find anywhere online, and they have no way of sorting through all that.
>
> Online stuff. I have a rule that students can't use it if there isn't a date.

Reading, Understanding, and Incorporating Sources

> I think a lot of poor writing comes from poor reading.
>
> I teach students reading strategies, [such as] finding the subjects in paragraphs.
>
> I have selected primary documents and my aim in those documents is to help them to draw some meaning out of those documents—to understand them on their own terms, to contextualize them, and then on to development and interpretation—typically around a question that I pose.
>
> I was trying to teach how to use peer-reviewed journals because we have this big push in social work for evidence-based practice, so part of it is critiquing research and part of it is bringing information from the literature and the research studies into their papers.
>
> I teach mostly upper level students—juniors and seniors—and I see a disconnect for them. They can read [a source], they seem to understand what it is about, but they really have a hard time making the connection and being able to say, "Okay, I've analyzed these three articles, this is the main theme, these are the things I'm seeing," and being able to articulate that.

Plagiarizing

> Some students [plagiarize] by taking [text] off the internet, thinking we can't find it when there are so many [plagiarism programs] out there.
>
> If I give any type of assignment that needs background information, they go to the internet, copy it, paste it into their papers and don't write it.
>
> The student just simply went to a federal site, downloaded everything, and took out the annotations between the paragraphs—everything [else] was exactly the same.

Summary

Focus-group comments reinforce just how important it is for students to manage source materials when it comes to college writing. This may come as no surprise to *EJ* readers; however, the degrees of complexity that the various skills require are worth highlighting here.

On one level, there are concrete and distinct tasks, such as choosing the appropriate citation style depending on disciplinary conventions and/or the professor's preference and then writing correctly in-text citations and works cited pages. *EJ* readers know that these "nuts and bolts" tasks can be tricky for high school students to negotiate. However, these tasks are actually far less complex when compared to more complicated research considerations, such as evaluating the quality of source materials, summarizing and analyzing an author's main point and his or her biases, evaluating supporting evidence, and considering opposing viewpoints. Perhaps most puzzling to students, however, is how to incorporate source materials into their writing, either to provide supporting evidence or to generate a thesis. Both require students to synthesize material, to merge an author's (or authors') ideas with and/or against the student's interpretation and filtered through the disciplinary lens of the course in question. At the least, focus group comments suggest that students would benefit from recognizing the varying range of necessary skills associated with managing source materials, with special emphasis given to the more complex skills. In addition, they might be encouraged to imagine research as something more than taking a stand—usually "for" or "against"—on an important issue or debate and then using source materials as rhetorical ammuni-

tion to shore up or support their personal perspective (often ignoring source material that doesn't support their preconceived position). Instead, conducting secondary research provides an opportunity to learn gradually and over time how to ask genuine, even knotty, questions about important topics introduced in a course and then to puzzle out not THE ANSWER but, instead, various answers that might address the question, depending on ideological biases and perspectives; or raise more genuine and knotty questions for further consideration.

What Did Participants Say about Learning to Write?

Focus-group comments also reflected a developmental view of writing growth. In other words, faculty in our focus group understood that students don't arrive on campus as fully competent college writers, nor do they believe students will learn everything they need to know about writing in First-Year Composition.

Adjusting to College Writing During the First Year

> Some of those freshmen at 8:00 in the morning don't have very good attendance habits, so they have these strikes against them before it has anything to do with actual writing.

> Getting students to follow directions is a huge first step, especially when 70% are freshmen.

> I never start a freshman class without talking about how they are going to use writing in the future, including other college courses.

Benefiting Over Time from Feedback and Guidance

> I let students [see my rubric] ahead of time, so they know what they will be graded on.

> I have a very good example—a model paper. I took a student paper, got permission, then fixed it up a little so that it's more correct, and stuck it on my website so students have a way of checking out an example.

> I think a lot of students are scared to death of intellectual effort and generating ideas. So for me, part of that important process is helping them feel safe and encouraging them in a number of ways to just take a risk.

> I also will review copies of papers ahead of time for those that really want to work on their writing skills.

> I spend at least a class period or two going over how to write themes and goals and objectives that are measurable, and they struggle with that, even when I tell them the objective words I want [them] to use are "identify," "list," and "describe."

> I wish there was a way of monitoring students over time, for their own benefit.

Understanding Writing as a Developmental Craft

> Students don't understand that writing is a craft that you improve and you're constantly improving and that it's not as if you can write or you can't.

> It's sort of like a one-shot presentation on HIV and expecting people to change their behavior. I mean you've got them for a semester, but [students] need [writing instruction] in a repeated fashion.

> I emphasize [writing] as a skill—this is a skill that you are learning, like painting, or driving, or playing the violin. You just have to practice.

Summary

Overall, focus-group comments supported "common sense" strategies that foster growth: (1) attending and being attentive in class; (2) using model papers, rubrics, and other supporting materials; (3) following assignment guidelines; (4) beginning papers early enough to discuss them in office hours; and (5) being not only receptive but also responsive to faculty feedback. These strategies will come as no surprise to high school students or their teachers. However, the focus-group comments also suggest that graduating high school seniors should combine the previously mentioned strategies with the right mindset toward writing, especially writing growth. More specifically, they should understand that when they arrive on campus, they won't know everything when it comes to college writing—no matter how good their grades were in high school, no matter how well their teachers taught them. Instead, they'll arrive at college and then "*continue to grow as writers* . . . as they constantly face new literacy challenges in unfamiliar academic terrains. This growth is likely to be recursive in nature; it will naturally take the shape

of ups and downs, forward and backward steps (and even leaps), and successes and 'interim failures' (Gregory 76) as they transition from high school to college writing and beyond" (Brockman, Taylor, Crawford, and Kreth 47–48; emphasis in original). This idea might be unsettling to some students, particularly "straight A" students who regard the academic enterprise not as a process or journey of discovery, but as a game or hoop already figured out, *un fait accompli.*

Nevertheless, other students might be reassured and even comforted. Instead of feeling scholastic pressure to know everything, these students will take the long, reasonable, and more realistic view of a four-year college career. Yes, we often characterize college as a means to an end, a professional stepping-stone to a "good" job, a middle-class life, and the American Dream; however, college also provides an educational opportunity in the truest sense of that phrase: a time for personal transformation and growth. This transformation and growth has the potential to influence the student as writer. According to Nancy Sommers and Laura Saltz, students who experience the most growth as writers, especially during the first year of college, tend to define themselves as "novice writers" (134), so they are most likely to understand that over time and with positive mentoring relationships, they will be guided toward becoming successful writers.

Three Implications

We hope our study prompts *EJ* readers to reflect on their composition pedagogy, especially as it pertains to college-bound students. More specifically, we predict that faculty comments have the power to reaffirm and support *EJ* readers' current classroom practices or to complicate and challenge them—or some combination thereof: How important is the five-paragraph essay or the standard research paper in helping prepare students for college? How often do I already incorporate summary as a writing-to-learn strategy? How do my classes and my department promote the idea that writing is a developmental craft? How complex are my writing assignments? What can be done to encourage intellectual risk taking among students? These are just a few examples of the kinds of questions *EJ* readers might ask themselves and their department, school, and/or district colleagues.

Second, we hope our focus-group comments prompt *EJ* readers to rethink assessment in a more positive light. As Vicki Spandel points out, "ours is a nation obsessed with assessment" (93), and the September 2001 theme for *English Journal* is "Assessing Ourselves to Death" (see especially Virginia R. Monseau's "From the Editor"). However, assessment is not inherently negative. As we note in "Helping Students Cross the Threshold," a wealth of university assessment initiatives have recently been (and are currently being) conducted, and most initiatives are locally designed and implemented by teachers to characterize and improve classroom instruction and student literacy at their institutions—all honorable objectives. *EJ* readers could similarly conduct local assessments, and we suggest focus-group discussions as an especially productive strategy for data collection. For example, *EJ* readers interested in learning more about college writing across disciplines might invite recent high school graduates currently enrolled in two- and four-year institutions and representing various programs of study to participate in focus groups. Results would reinforce or extend those reported here, and they could be shared in a number of venues, including department, school, and school board meetings, as well as state and national journals, conferences, and institutes.

Finally, we hope that our focus-group comments help to broaden "writing pedagogy" discussion beyond English and English education teachers so that it includes teachers across disciplines. Because these teachers read different journals from the ones we read and are unlikely to attend our conferences, we offer as a starting point an innovative solution, especially to editors of NCTE and state affiliate journal or National Writing Project site communication outlets (e.g., websites, blogs, or wikis): Create a featured column about college writing. More specifically, we imagine a regular column that would be highly practical, a column that would showcase a specific writing assignment designed by a particular college professor and then include some kind of practical response, perhaps the professor's commentary about the assignment or a question-and-answer session between the professor and a high school English teacher. Regardless of assignment and response, the column would pro-

vide the opportunity for English teachers to read and analyze, over time, dozens of college writing assignments across disciplines, assignments that would otherwise not be readily accessible.

Final Words

Assessment results and the implications from our focus-group discussions bring to mind Kenneth Burke's well-known parlor metaphor:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. (110–11)

Like the newcomer in the metaphor, we hope that *EJ* readers will not only listen to the professional dialogue regarding college writing across the disciplines but that they will also "put in their oar" by sharing their own classroom practices, local assessment results, and teacherly perspectives in various teaching venues, such as NWP summer institutes, professional conferences, and future *EJ* articles.

Note

We wish to thank the anonymous reviewer of our earlier article who suggested that focus-group comments alone would be of tremendous interest to *EJ* readers.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The National Gallery of Writing is a rich resource of writing from all walks of life and provides a lively reading experience. Publication in the Gallery is an opportunity for writers to share their craft and find a broad and diverse audience. These samples can then be used in the classroom or students can submit their writing. http://www.galleryofwriting.org/

Alleen Pace Nilsen, James Blasingame Jr., Kenneth L. Donelson, Shelly Shaffer, Tim Smith, and Allison Wimmer

2009 YA Honor List—Timely and Timeless

In an annual English Journal *tradition, the well-known adolescent literature critics survey their picks for the best YA lit of the year.*

This year when we settled down to read and relish the books that various editors and committees have chosen to highlight as the "Best Books of 2009," we had more reasons than usual to think about matters of time. The first book we read was the winner of the Newbery Award, Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me* (Random House), which is a fascinating account of time travel with heavy reliance on Madeleine L'Engle's *Wrinkle in Time.* We did not include it on the Honor List—it really is a children's book—but we are mentioning Stead's book because, out of nostalgia, plus fascination with the concept of time travel, many high school students, as well as adults, will probably enjoy it.

We also want to share the news that Jim Murphy, who writes in real time—but in the past—is the first nonfiction writer to be honored with the Margaret A. Edwards Award, given annually to an author who has made an exceptional contribution to young adult literature. His 2009 book, *Truce: The Day the Soldiers Stopped Fighting* (Scholastic), seems more appropriate for tweeners, but the five books mentioned by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) judges are all recommended for high school students: *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* (Clarion, 2003), *Blizzard! The Storm That Changed America* (Scholastic, 2000), *The Great Fire* (Scholastic, 1995), *The Long Road to Gettysburg* (Clarion, 1992), and *A Young Patriot: The American Revolution as Experienced by One Boy* (Clarion, 1996).

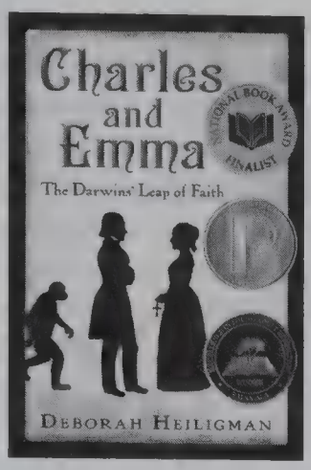
All in all, 2009 was a good year for young adult nonfiction. Phillip Hoose won the National Book Award for *Claudette Colvin, Twice toward Justice,* while a runner-up, Deborah Heiligman's *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith,* was chosen as the recipient of the first Young Adult Library Services Award for nonfiction. An interesting time-related tidbit in Heiligman's book is that Charles Darwin was born on the same day as Abraham Lincoln (February 12, 1809), and when we read Rick Yancey's *The Monstrumologist,* we were fascinated—or maybe *repelled* is a better word—by a fantasy about a scientist in the late 1800s who was hoping to earn the same kind of respect already being given to Charles Darwin.

Here, without further ado, we present in alphabetical order our 2009 Honor List with our usual caveat that while we cannot guarantee that these are absolutely "the best" YA books published in 2009, or the ones that will last the longest, we do vouch for the fact that many critics and reviewers, including we three teachers of young adult literature and the three graduate students who we invited to help us write reviews, found them well worth reading and thinking about.

Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith

Deborah Heiligman. New York: Holt, 2009. 268 pp. $18.95. Grades 7 and up. ISBN: 078-0-8050-8721-5.

A news announcement recently arrived in my university mailbox about a new interdisciplinary certification program in environmental humanities, and the sentence that caught my eye was, "After all, who would know about Darwin if not for his famously poetic prose?" I was in the midst of reading



Deborah Heiligman's beautifully written and researched story of Charles and Emma Darwin where nearly every chapter is prefaced with a quote from either Emma's or Charles's journals or letters. Heiligman's book won the first YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award and was a finalist for the National Book Award, the Michael L. Printz Award, and the *L.A. Times* Book Prize.

While the book was released as part of the yearlong celebration of Charles Darwin's 200th birthday, Heiligman focuses equally on Emma and Charles and their marriage. She thought she was the perfect person to write such a book because she majored in religious studies in college and shortly after graduation met and married a science writer. He was the one who told her about how Charles Darwin and his wife, Emma, loved each other, but that the religious Emma was worried that Charles "would go to hell and they wouldn't be together for eternity." Heiligman put this conversation in her closing acknowledgments where she added, "If bells had chimed . . . or fireworks had exploded in the sky . . . I would not have been surprised [because] I knew right then I had a book to write" (237).

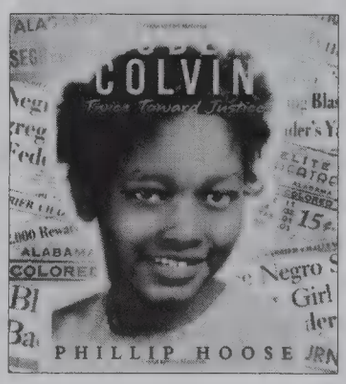
Teachers who are depressed because teenagers are getting their ideas about love and romance from the Twilight books or from so-called reality shows might want to encourage their students to read *Charles and Emma,* which a reviewer for *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* predicted would attract readers "for the science" but would make them "stay for the love story." I often lament the fact that history books skip over the ordinary lives of women and families and that at least in "school books" writers never acknowledge that birth control, along with the improved medical care available in industrialized countries, is what has changed the world for women. Heiligman does not discuss this as such, but in telling the story of Emma and Charles and the way they both suffered when Emma gave birth to their ten children and when they were unable to keep three of them from dying in childhood, Heiligman shows readers a glimpse into the kinds of struggles faced by women even in well-to-do families. Emma's father was Josiah Wedgwood, the famous pottery maker, while Charles's father was a prosperous physician.

Another "teacherly" reason for encouraging students to read Heiligman's book is that it is a model of skilled research and writing in a digital age. She provides not only a three-page "Selected Bibliography" at the end but also 18 pages of "Source Notes" documenting the quotes in each of the 34 chapters. Teachers might want to walk students through her two most valuable sources, *The Darwin Correspondence Project* (http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk) and *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online* (http://darwin-online.org.uk), because they are good examples of how serious research is being made possible by advancements in technology. (APN)

Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice

Philip Hoose. New York: Farrar, 2009. 133 pp. $19.95. Grades 6 and up. ISBN: 978-0-374-31322-9.

Most people are aware of Rosa Parks's famous contribution to the civil rights movement but are surprised to learn that she was not the first person in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest Jim Crow laws by refusing to move to the back of the bus. A touching moment at the November 18, 2009, National Book Awards was when Philip Hoose was declared the winner in the young readers division for *Claudette Colvin: Twice toward Justice* and he and his guest, the not-so-young Claudette Colvin, whose story he told in the prize-winning book, walked slowly toward



the podium. He assured her that she didn't need to hurry because this was her "moment."

On March 2, 1955, Claudette, "a bespectacled, studious looking" 15-year-old school girl, was forced off a city bus, arrested, and charged with violating segregation laws, disturbing the peace, and "assaulting" a police officer. Others who had been arrested on similar charges had pleaded guilty, but Claudette felt she had done nothing wrong—she certainly had not "assaulted" a police officer—and so she refused to plead guilty.

Claudette's attorney, Fred Grey, argued that the laws requiring racial segregation were unconstitutional. He organized a committee of black leaders to help obtain justice for Claudette, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the young leader of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and Rosa Parks herself, then secretary of the Montgomery National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Black leaders rallied around Claudette, raising money, writing letters, and meeting with legal officials. Despite these efforts, Claudette was found guilty of all charges. The leader of Montgomery's Women's Political Council, Jo Anne Robinson, wrote, "The verdict was like a bombshell" (47).

The verdict contributed to a feeling of rebellion and unrest that was growing among the black community and toward talk of a citywide bus boycott. Although Claudette was eager to continue fighting the injustice of segregation, adult leaders doubted whether Claudette's case would be the one to make a difference. Contributing to their decision was the fact that shortly after being convicted, Claudette became pregnant, which caused the adult leaders and even some of her friends to harden their attitudes toward her. They worried that she would be viewed as an emotional, rebellious teen.

Leaders asked the older, more settled, and respected Rosa Parks, who worked as a dressmaker and seamstress, to take a front seat on a Montgomery bus. A few weeks later Rosa Parks did exactly that and was arrested. Predictions about the black community being ready to take action proved accurate, and the famous months-long Montgomery bus boycott was launched.

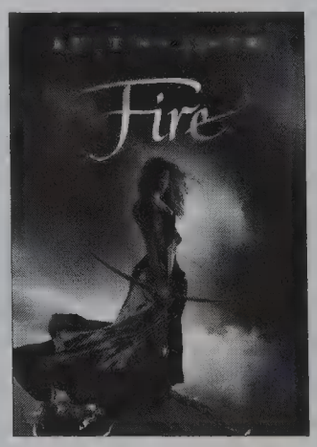
In addition to the boycott, Fred Grey had a plan to challenge the constitutionality of the segregation laws at the national level. He argued that if segregated schools were unconstitutional—as the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*—then segregated buses must be unconstitutional as well. Black leaders raised money to file the suit while Grey looked for people willing to testify about the impact of the Jim Crow laws. A public testimony would be dangerous: courage would be the number-one requirement. Grey knew Claudette had plenty of courage and so he asked her to join in the suit as one of four plaintiffs. She did not hesitate to sign on, and she became a footnote to the famous June 19, 1956, case of *Browder v. Gayle,* in which a federal court abolished segregated seating on Alabama's buses.

Hoose's book moves Claudette Colvin's story from footnote to headline, where it belongs. And because he tells her story within the context of the civil rights movement, accompanied by informational sidebars, photos, and reproductions of newspaper stories and other historical documents, the book will be a welcome resource not only for classes studying the civil rights movement but also for leisure reading by students who want to get inside a fellow teenager's mind at a very important time in American history. (AW)

Fire

Kristin Cashore. New York: Dial, 2009. 491 pp. $17.99.
Grades 9 and up. ISBN: 978-0-8037-3461-6.

In her fantasy, *Fire,* Kristin Cashore explores the kingdom of the Dells, which is the land beyond the seven kingdoms, the setting for last year's popular *Graceling.* In the Dells, monsters, creatures with vibrant, colorful skin and hair, live among the people. They exist in forms ranging from harmless mice and cats to predatory raptors and mountain lions. The human monster named Fire is the daughter of a monster tyrant named Cansrel and a human



mother named Lessa. When Fire is still an infant, Cansrel takes her from her mother to live in the country at his northern estate, which he feels is a safer place for a young monster to grow up. A friendly neighbor named Brocker takes an interest in helping to raise her and steps in to care for her education. However, he can tend only to the human side of Fire's education and leaves the rest to her father, who trains her in the use of mind reading and mind control. During these training sessions, Fire discovers her father's cruelty and has a hard time reconciling what she sees in her father's mind with the idea of the father she wants to believe in.

At the time the book begins, Fire is 18 years old and Cansrel has been dead for three years. She has just been attacked by an archer near her forest home. Even while using her mind-control skills, she cannot figure out who this man is or who sent him. This discovery and the investigation that follows change her quiet country life into one filled with adventure and danger. It also inspires her to leave her isolated home and go to the capital city, where she must face her fears.

Monsters, large and small, are drawn to Fire, especially when her hair is showing or when she is bleeding; thus, she is in danger every time she goes outside. When an opportunity arises to prove herself by helping the royal family of the Dells fight against insurgents who threaten to plunge the Dells into a civil war, Fire hesitates for fear she will abuse her powers as her father had done. She also feels handicapped because there are those "who only want to look or touch or tell me things—the ones who are simply overcome, or think they love me, and are gentle in their feelings" (155). She tries to retreat but is told, "You're wasting something you have . . . Something the rest of us could only imagine possessing. Waste is criminal" (216).

Fire is a powerful book about a young girl learning to love and accept herself. A dark cloud seems to hang over Fire; each time her father is mentioned, she feels dread. But at last with the help of others she begins to see that her giftedness does not mean she has to become evil. She observes that a son can "choose the man he would be" just as a daughter monster can "choose the monster she would be" (221). At last, Fire realizes that she is able to choose for herself. Cashore is a strong writer, and Fire is a character young adult readers will be able to relate to and love. Readers can enjoy *Fire* even if they have not read *Graceling,* but I predict that once they have been introduced to either of the books, they will rush out and get the other one. (SS)

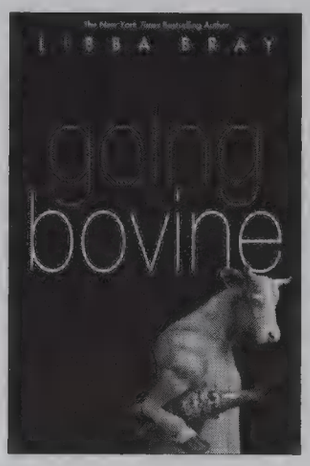
Going Bovine

Libba Bray. New York: Delacorte, 2009. 496 pp. $17.99. Grades 8 and up. ISBN: 978-0385733977.

Given the options available now, we could have chosen to read this winner of the Printz Award on Kindle, listen to it on CDs, or read it in print. My husband and I chose to listen to it as we drove back and forth to school. Then I bought a print copy, which my YA students immediately absconded with and are passing from one to the other. Thus, this is a review of the unabridged reading of Bray's *Going Bovine* by Erik Davies, which provides amusement and mental stimulation for 15 hours and 9 minutes.

As most of us know, a *surcharge* or a *surtax* is something "above and beyond" or "over the top." Libba Bray's *Going Bovine* is a *surreal* book that goes so "above and beyond" that it is "way out there." For example, when the protagonist rescues a stolen yard gnome, it turns out to be the Norse god Balder, who despite being trapped in a body that he cannot move is perfectly capable of thinking and talking to those characters he happens to like. And when the protagonist gets sick, he doesn't come down with an ordinary illness such as mononucleosis or diabetes. He is diagnosed with Creutzfeldt-Jacob, aka the incurable "mad cow" disease, which inevitably turns brains into something like sponges.

Sixteen-year-old Cameron is the hero and narrator who begins by telling readers that the best day of his life was when he was "five and almost



died at Disney World" (1). He was on the It's a Small World ride, floating with his parents and his sister through a darkened tunnel, when he suddenly has a dystopian vision that they are all being ferried toward certain destruction. He spies a little door on the side of the passage and flings himself out of the boat and into the water with the intention of escaping through the door and turning off the machinery to save his family. Of course the boat is stopped and Cameron and his family—along with all the other ticket holders—are "rescued."

In analyzing the plot, we decided that Bray started with this incident as a way of introducing readers to Cameron's fertile imagination, which they will soon see in full bloom. Everyone is terribly sorry about Cameron's illness. Even the jocks at school participate in an assembly honoring Cameron, which he gets to watch from his bed at home through a specially rigged telecast. One good thing is that he doesn't have to finish reading *Don Quixote* for his English class, but he launches himself on a journey that even casual readers can't help but recognize as having similarities to the picaresque wanderings of Don Quixote and the faithful Sancho Panza. Cameron's sidekick is Gonzo, a boy he knew only casually at school but who turns out to be Cam's hospital roommate. Gonzo is a dwarf and suffers from asthma and an overprotective mother. Cameron has a hard-sell to make when he explains to Gonzo that the two of them are destined to go on a journey to find Dr. X, a man who will not only be able to save Cameron from his disease but also to save the world from a disaster that is already on the horizon.

Cameron is told to go on this journey by Dulcie (undoubtedly a shortened form of *Dulcinea*), a punk fairy with pink hair who throughout the story serves as a guide and helper, but who occasionally needs protection from villains who want to get her into a snow globe. The quest that Cameron and Gonzo take is not just an ordinary trip. It takes them from the hospital in Texas to the jazz clubs of New Orleans and eventually to spring break in Florida, where they join with college kids vying to get on television and to create new reality shows.

Bray's dark humor ensures that readers' emotions are successfully stretched from the tragedy of Cameron's real-life situation to the comedy of his hallucinations. And because readers' emotions are stretched taut, they become even more involved with the challenge of figuring out what is real and what is imagined. Bray is so skilled at pulling readers into her story that pretty soon we stopped quibbling and just sat back and enjoyed becoming part of Cameron's fascinating, surreal world. As readers (or listeners) we felt fortunate to become a part of Cameron's fascinating, surreal world. (APN)

Marcelo in the Real World

Francisco X. Stork. New York: Scholastic, 2009. 320 pp. $17.99. Grades 9 and up. ISBN: 978-0-545-05474-4.

Seventeen-year-old Marcelo Sandoval is heading into the summer just before his senior year of high school. He loves his summer job, caring for the Halfling breed ponies that are a special project of the Paterson School, a private institution for young people with special needs. Marcelo is a student at Paterson, a place that feels like home to him because of the accommodations made to fit Marcelo's needs as an autistic teen. Marcelo's condition, as he often explains, is closer to Asperger's syndrome than to any other medical condition. He does not intuitively know how to interact with other human beings and he is somewhat consumed, as children with Asperger's syndrome often are, by a special interest. In Marcelo's case, the special interest is religious studies. Marcelo has been raised Roman Catholic, but he has frequent appointments with a Jewish rabbi, who is also a colleague of his mother's. Marcelo refers to Rabbi Heschel as a "holy man that is a woman" (115). Marcelo and Rabbi Heschel talk about specific things that are bothering Marcelo, things that he hopes the rabbi will be able to explain, such as the relationships between God and Man, good and evil, and sex and sin. Because of

Marcelo's unique perspective on the world, his take on the deepest of philosophical conundrums might be best described as a combination of how Mr. Spock and Forrest Gump would view similar dilemmas: logical, simple, and pure of heart.

Marcelo is inclined to speak of people, including himself, in the third person even when they are present. Since the story is told in first person from Marcelo's point of view, readers are often introduced to characters by their first names and it may take a few pages to figure out who each character is, such as Arturo, Marcelo's father, and Aurora, Marcelo's mother. Arturo convinces Aurora that all the "indulgences" they have allowed Marcelo over his 17 years—special school, special doctors, and even a special bedroom in a tree—may have prevented him from reaching his potential in "the real world." Arturo believes that Paterson does not challenge Marcelo to cope with problems and is enabling his retreat further and further into autism. A summer working for Arturo's law firm will force Marcelo to explore his true potential. Arturo believes that, even though it will sometimes be painful, the experience will show Marcelo that he is capable of attending a regular public high school for his senior year. If Marcelo makes it through the summer, following all the rules, he may choose to attend public school or return to Paterson.

Marcelo in the real world of Arturo's law firm will prove to be something his father was not ready for. With the pure heart and honesty of a child, Marcelo will judge the law firm's practices, and with the obsessiveness and intelligence that come with his special needs, he will attempt to undo some atrocities the firm committed in the quest for filthy lucre. The irony here will be how badly many of the firm's members underestimate Marcelo, never realizing until it is too late that he is more avenging angel than mail room flunky. By the summer's end Marcelo will have aired the law firm's dirty laundry, including some rather disappointing personal faux pas of his father's. Marcelo is not conquered by the real world.

Francisco X. Stork has written a book that is witty, funny, touching, heartwarming, and heart rending. The literary quality of the work makes this a book that could be around for a long time. The ethical questions Stork explores are probed with wisdom and sophisticated thought but also with a lot of heart. This book would be good for adult readers as well as high school students, but the complexity of the ideas is probably beyond the emotional maturity of middle school readers. (JB Jr.)

The Monstrumologist

Rick Yancey. New York: Simon, 2009. 434 pp. $17.99. Grades 11 and up. ISBN: 978-1-4391-5261-4.

On the off chance that Rick Yancey's readers may have no idea what a monstrumologist (or monstrumology) is, the author provides a definition in the front matter of the book that could easily be slipped into a standard dictionary after *monstrous* or *monstrously.*

> monstrumology n. 1: the study of life forms generally malevolent to humans and not recognized by science as actual organisms, specifically those considered products of myth and folklore. 2: the act of hunting such creatures. (frontispiece)

Two pages later, Yancey cites a few quotations and texts about monsters, the oldest coming from Herodotus in 440 B.C. He is given credit for the terms *Andropophagi* or *Anthropophagi,* which become significant in Yancey's horror story.

Now I need to make a confession and immediately modify it. Of all YA books I might choose to read, horror stories are at the bottom of the list. However, I am not unacquainted with them because during a few years of my misspent youth, I was addicted to horror stories, particularly by three masters of the supernatural—Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, and my favorite, H. P. Lovecraft. Enough happy memories of those days and those stories remain that I believe I can fairly review Yancey's book.

During a brief prologue, the author creates a fictional explanation for his acquiring "thirteen thick notebooks, tied in brown twine" and supposedly written by William Henry James, an elderly man who has just passed away with no known relatives. When Yancey picks up the notebooks, he is told that James likely suffered from advanced dementia. Yancey takes the books home and six months later begins to read them, which results in the publication of this book, to be followed by at least one more. The plot begins "in the midst of things" with James as a twelve-year-old assistant to Dr. Warthrop. He writes:

> These are the secrets I have kept. This is the trust I never betrayed. But he is dead now and has been for more than forty years, the one who gave me his trust, the one for whom I kept these secrets . . . . I remember with nightmarish clarity that spring night in 1888 when he roused me roughly, his hair unkempt, eyes wide and shining in the lamplight . . . . "Get up! Get up, Will Henry, and be quick about it!" He said urgently. "We have a caller." (3)

The speaker is Dr. Pellinore Warthrop, whose life is consumed by monstrumology, and the caller is Erasmus Gray, a grave robber, frightened not by his illegal act but by what he has found and delivered to Dr. Warthrop. It is a bundle wrapped in burlap and containing "two bodies, one wrapped about the other in an obscene embrace" (15). One is the body of a young girl, while the second is a headless "specimen of the genus anthropophagi, male, approximately twenty-five to thirty years of age," as the doctor says (14). While the doctor examines the bodies, he dictates to Will, "The typical anthropophagi pod consists of twenty to twenty-five breeding females, a handful of juveniles, and one alpha male" (40). When the boy fails to respond positively, he adds, "Don't you see, Will Henry? There could not be more than two or three others" around because these creatures must have food to survive and there have been no "attacks, no sightings, no evidence, direct or indirect, of their presence here beyond that, he jabbed a finger at the beast" (41).

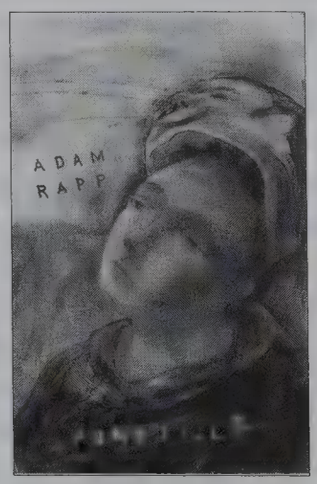
While this is meant to reassure Will, it mainly notifies readers that horror is soon to come, and indeed it does as the grave robber, the scientist, and the twelve-year-old assistant hasten to the local graveyard in a horse-drawn cart carrying the corpse of the young girl, assorted stakes, gunpowder, rope, torches, and kerosene to fight or kill the anthropophagi. Yancey's book picks up speed and never lets it down. Will Henry believably establishes himself as hero, and a hunt that began slowly becomes the most thrilling part of the novel. I thought the incredible scenes of horror and terror went on too long, but one linguistic feature I long ago associated with horror stories is an incredible wealth of language, colorful and sometimes blistering, which in a strange way makes palatable the essentially unpalatable. For those who prefer to hear—rather than read—such language, an unabridged recording (Recorded Books, 11:45 hrs) also received a starred review in the March 2010 issue of *School Library Journal.*

Two intriguing parts of the story include the fact that the monsters may have been brought to the United States by a scientist hoping to become as respected for his work as Charles Darwin had become for his studies and that the recently deceased Will Henry James, the author of the memoir, who was alleged to be 133 years old, may owe his longevity to having somehow become impervious to the vicissitudes of old age through his early association with the anthropophagi species. (KLD)

Punkzilla

Adam Rapp. Somerville: Candlewick, 2009. 244 pp. $16.99. Grades 9 and up. ISBN: 978-0-7636-3031-7.

Punkzilla is the story of 14-year-old Jamie Wyckoff, called Punkzilla or Punk because of his love for punk music. He is a runaway trying to get from



Portland, Oregon, to Memphis, Tennessee, in time to say good-bye to his dying brother, Peter, or P as Jamie calls him. The story is told through the letters that Jamie writes and reads as he alternates between hitchhiking and riding buses. On the trip, he is both helped and harmed by strangers, and he is so young, innocent, and confused that when he is sexually molested, he simply shakes it off and looks for another ride.

His brother, P, is an intelligent and successful playwright who has always had a good relationship with Jamie. P was pretty much expelled from the family because the boys' father, a military man, is horrified at the idea of having a gay son. And probably because Jamie has a small build and "dainty" features, the father fears that he too will be gay, and so the parents send him to Buckner Military Academy in Missouri allegedly because they believe that a good military lifestyle will straighten him out and keep him away from the "bad crowd" and the drugs and alcohol he had been experimenting with.

Jamie goes AWOL from Buckner and hitchhikes to Portland, Oregon, where he falls in with a much worse crowd than he could ever have found at home. He supports himself by selling stolen iPods to a man named Fat Larkin. He gets them through conning people or through hiding in a park and waiting for vulnerable runners whom he knocks unconscious with a heavy alarm clock. When Jamie hears that his brother is dying of cancer, he starts on a cross-country trip and manages to get to Memphis while P is still alive but unconscious. When P dies and the brothers' parents come to attend the funeral, Jamie watches from afar, never letting his parents know he is there. The book ends on a positive note when P's partner, Jorge, agrees to take Jamie in and give him a new start.

Jamie's only significant possession is the spiral notebook in which he writes the letters to P and also stores letters that he has received and likes to reread. Author Adam Rapp writes plays as well as novels and so he is accustomed to managing different voices and styles, and this shows up in the letters that Jamie cherishes. Another of Rapp's skills is that he can give the impression of a high school dropout writing whatever happens to come into his head and yet having it be thought-provoking, as when Jamie writes to P telling him that all the fields in Illinois blurred together, but he clearly remembers the cows

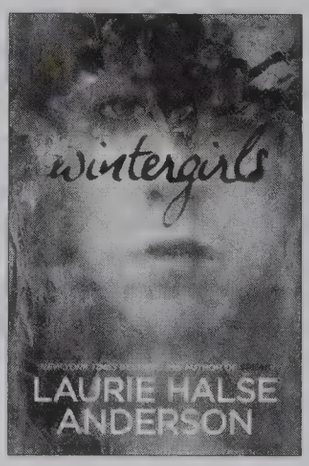
> sort of standing around, like men talking about money or something. The weird thing about cows P is that when it's about to rain they huddle like they're playing FOOTBALL, or something! I was like "What are they doing?" and Kent [the man he is hitchhiking with] said "Makin' plans. They'll prolly take over this godforsaken world at some point. The cows and the goats and all the other things we pump the hormones into. . . ." (206)

This casual style, with spellings and punctuation in dialect, allows for quick reading while also displaying Jamie's racy and confused thoughts about the harsh realities of life on the road. In many ways the book is raw, depressing, and scary. Teachers and librarians need to be well acquainted with a young reader before handing over any of Adam Rapp's books. They also need to be ready to answer questions about drug use, homosexuality, androgyny, violence, and transgender identity. While some parents might prefer their children never learn about such things, other parents would rather have their children learn about them through a carefully written book than through real life. (TS)

Wintergirls

Laurie Halse Anderson. New York: Viking, 2009. 278 pp. $17.99. High school and up. ISBN: 978-0-670-01110-0.

When best-friends-for-life Cassie and Lia first meet in third grade, Cassie shows Lia her most treasured possession, a round disc of green sea-glass. Cassie claims it is not *sea-glass* but *see-glass* because it had not been formed in the sea but forged inside a volcano, and if they look through it at the stars in the



right moment, they can see their futures: "Poet. Acrobat. Engineer. Friend. Guardian. Avenging whirlwind" (271). The possibilities are limitless and wonderful. Little do they know that by their senior year, Cassie's self-destructive behavior will lead to her death, and Lia will be on the verge of meeting the same fate, both victims of anorexia.

As the story opens, Cassie has been found dead in a motel room. The confidential autopsy determines her cause of death as kidney failure and a ruptured esophagus, probably from years of forced vomiting and an inadequate intake of healing nutrients, i.e., food. In a flashback to the eighth grade and Christmas vacation, Cassie and Lia are on a skiing vacation with Cassie's parents. Lia has been practically abandoned by her divorced parents, whose lives have little room for her. Her father is off on a honeymoon with his new wife, and her mother, a famous cardiac surgeon, is in Costa Rica visiting a new hospital. On New Year's Eve, the two best friends, left to their own devices by Cassie's parents, get drunk on nonalcoholic champagne mixed with vodka. They swear a blood oath, complete with lacerated palms, to become the two skinniest girls in school. Lia, already unusually thin, realizes this may be the only thing she will ever excel at, but for Cassie the motivation has deeper psychological underpinnings.

In a flashback to fifth grade, readers learn how Cassie's premature female development resulted in sexual taunts and the snapping of her bra straps by both boys and girls. Cassie's issues with body image are complex and deep, and so begins years of calorie counting, forced vomiting, taking unneeded laxatives, and secret working-out in the middle of the night to burn off what little nutrition had been coerced down her throat by worried parents and counselors. So also begin the multiple car accidents from loss of consciousness, the weeks in rehab centers, and the unsuccessful counseling sessions. The old sexual taunts give way to taunts of "Dead girl walking!" and yet Cassie and Lia never waiver in their march toward self-destruction.

When their friendship goes on the rocks for a few months, both sets of parents are relieved, but without each other's support, the girls get worse rather than better. When Cassie finds herself dying in a motel room, she tries telephoning Lia, but Lia, who is still angry at being rejected, does not pick up. Only after Cassie's death does Lia listen to the 33 desperate phone messages that Cassie left. Plagued by guilt, and literally starved out of her mind, Lia begins to hallucinate that Cassie visits her from the grave, ridiculing her life and urging her to honor their oath and join her on the other side.

As the book accelerates to its conclusion, Lia is driven by two desires: (1) to avoid being a harmful influence on her younger stepsister Emma and (2) to retrace Cassie's final steps at the motel and understand what happened to her. In the end, Lia begins to understand her own psychosis.

Anderson's writing surpasses anything she's done before, and that is no small feat. She experiments with writing techniques such as inserting the number of calories in parentheses whenever a piece of food is mentioned and by having Lia write what she really thinks and then crossing that out in favor of what she actually says. Readers get both versions because the crossed-out text stays in the book. And repeatedly Anderson inserts the numbers 1–33 in small print to show how the number of Cassie's ignored phone calls never leaves Lia's mind. These techniques capture Lia's mental illness in ways that traditional narration could not. The book is a must-read for every parent, teacher, counselor, adult, and child who has ever struggled with anorexia or struggled to understand the plight of a person with anorexia. (JB Jr.)

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Challenging Texts

"We're going to start a new unit," explained Sharon, a teacher candidate in secondary English language arts who was a few weeks into a field placement the spring of her senior year. Sharon proceeded to explain that students would be working in groups; they were to read the section in their textbook on American Romanticism and answer the questions she provided on the board.

This day, Sharon was being observed by her university supervisor, me. I had been pushing her to shift the responsibility and work from herself to her students. The activity she was asking the students to do—read the textbook account of American Romanticism and take notes—was clearly based in part on her allowing students to draw conclusions about the literary movement *before* she offered her PowerPoint presentation and further notes on the era exemplified by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller.

Sharon is a wonderful young teacher, bright, genuine, and dedicated. Yet as she walked around the room monitoring the dutiful students reading and taking notes from their texts, I was writing frantically on her observation form:

- What sort of interaction with text do your Qs prompt? . . . Primarily simple content, right?
- Is Romanticism as a GOAL really important (and the way it is being approached now tells students that it is the goal)? Of any real value to students? . . . How could you change "covering Romanticism" to using Romanticism as a means to another, more authentic end? . . . And what would that end be?
- The textbook is overwhelming. . . . Look at the tremendous amount of DIFFERENT texts and graphics . . . way too much . . . and the message is that literature ITSELF does not matter. . . .
- ALTERNATIVE: Copy a passage from Emerson or Thoreau (yes, the text only), and have the STUDENTS read and draw conclusions from the primary text FIRST . . . then discuss as a class. . . . THEN have them place that text (and possibly a few more) within the literary tradition (which is arbitrary at best) . . . also you could have them do this with different genres (all first) . . . essays, short fiction, poetry . . . and then place those differing genres in the context of a literary tradition. . . .
- Possible opening activity: Choose a provocative brief passage from Emerson ("A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds") or Thoreau ("I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government") and have them respond PERSONALLY to the ideas (and without knowing who wrote them) . . . and then do the above. . . .

Here we are once again as literacy scholars and teacher educators faced with the power of inauthentic texts, traditional practices, and the critical commitment we feel schools routinely ignore and even deny.

Referencing DeRoche, June Rose Richie laments that there are "too many two-by-four teachers, too many who limit their teaching and the learning experiences of their students to the two covers of the textbook and the four walls of the classroom" (125). And I believe she is correct, but asking teachers to eliminate textbooks seems to be asking too much. Is it?

Consider Tom Romano's reminder to himself:

> I wanted my students to remind themselves what has really mattered to them about reading literature. What mattered, I figured, wasn't assonance or consonance or plot diagrams or literary movements or the history of the novel or the Romantic Age. It is easy to forget what really matters in literature

> after so many years of literature courses in which analysis, exegesis, formal criticism, and distanced, bloodless papers have been the norm. (9)

This experience prompted me to begin a conversation with a colleague, Renita Schmidt, leading to her piece below.

Challenging Textbooks: Servants, Not Masters of Our Classrooms

Renita Schmidt
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> The modern textbook is an invaluable servant but an intolerable master for a competent teacher. (Caswell, qtd. in Buckingham et al. 242)

> Textbooks are designed to aid learning and teaching. Their value depends upon the intelligence with which they are used. (Durell, qtd. in Buckingham et al. 242)

> [Textbooks] are sanitized to avoid offending anyone who might complain at textbook adoption hearings in big states, they are poorly written, they are burdened with irrelevant and unedifying content, and they reach for the lowest common denominator. (Finn and Ravitch i)

There is no question about it: Textbooks hold tremendous power as discursive materials in school classrooms. They cover the desks in the classrooms I visit and have been used as instructional tools since before the beginning of the United States. When I began teaching in the late 1970s, my school district provided basal readers as the materials I should use for elementary reading instruction. Only a few months into my first year of teaching I remember wondering, *How does this book know what lesson will help my students today? Who decides what stories should be included here and what order is best for them?* I didn't know it at the time, but I was questioning the power of the textbook and its publishers. I knew my students better than any publisher could ever know them and I was tired of letting someone outside my classroom make contextual decisions *for* my classroom.

Teachers today must take that stance even more firmly in this world of high-stakes accountability and standards-based education to claim teaching as a profession. Teachers and students are capable creators of curriculum. Reading First, No Child Left Behind, Response to Intervention, and now Race to the Top require research-based methods for instruction and high student achievement levels manufactured by the numbers associated with standardized tests. Paul Thomas and I previously wrote that in too many school districts, that translates into instruction that centers around basal textbooks and specific programs as the main materials used for reading and literature classes.

Only a few months into my first year of teaching I remember wondering, *How does this book know what lesson will help my students today? Who decides what stories should be included here and what order is best for them?*

The problem is not only textbooks and their content; it is the order in which decisions are made about curriculum when textbooks are used and the perspective offered when one authoritative text is the main material. When teachers begin with textbooks, materials dominate curricular decisions made in schools. Curriculum is not what the students or teacher wonder about, but what is in the textbook. English language arts textbooks often offer only parts of quality texts for reading, suggest questions and topics for discussion, and tout specific skills taught in sequential order for "best" instruction. Should instruction begin with materials? Is it meaningful to read only parts of quality texts? Will textbooks help teachers differentiate learning and offer the kinds of learning experiences today's diverse classrooms require?

Where Learning Begins in Classrooms

John Dewey urged teachers to offer learning experiences that would enable learning for all: "Just as no man lives or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in future experiences. Hence the central problem of an educational experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (*Experience* 16–17). Not only does Dewey discuss the excitement of learning through experience for the student, but his rich ideas

about problem-solving involve the excitement of facilitation and organization of those learning experiences for the professional within that same experience. Dewey also reminded us that good experience requires the side-by-side assessment of a professional educator who understands the importance of differentiated learning for each student in contextual ways. Working as an educator offers educative experiences for students and teachers—when we remember that we are all learners.

As educators we hold a feeling of responsibility for building lifelong learners. Considering ways learning works in everyday life helps us realize that learning must be steeped in inquiry. When my husband and I wanted to buy a new car, we worked collaboratively. I began my search on the Internet to see what different consumer reports said about the best cars. I shared the materials I found with him and he shared what he found with me. Then we visited car dealers in our area to have a real experience—see the cars, touch them, and smell their newness. We read and talked about the economy in our country and thought about how we could help during this difficult time of high unemployment and incentive programs. I thought about my feelings of responsibility for sustainability and care of the world. All of these complex ways of working and thinking linked our learning to world issues such as society, politics, and economics. Isn't that the type of continual learning we must strive for in school as well?

Dewey introduced his ideas about the experiential continuum at the turn of the 20th century as he encouraged educators to move from the harsher traditional types of schooling to more progressive measures. In his explanation of a "theory of experience" (*Experience* 12) he pointed out that not all experiences are equally educative and argued for the importance of linkage between experiences. According to Dewey, if educators help learners organize their experiences intelligently then education will continuously move, but not if educators self-impose their own experiences and organized subject matter on the learners as transmitted knowledge (*The Child*). Teaching such as that is what Freire called teaching as transmission or the "banking concept" (*Pedagogy* 72), not rich learning or an educative experience worthy of school time.

Taking a critical sociocultural stance, I question teaching as transmission and seek ways to push against the production and challenge of dominance. Michel Foucault can help us think more about how power is shaped productively but also how power is used hegemonically as discourse accepted and legitimized by teachers, administrators, and parents in institutional settings such as schools. The "right way" to teach becomes coercive as it is accepted as a status quo best practice that appears in every classroom. This happens not only in the larger institution of school but also at the school-building level (see Sarason). Although most teachers realize there is not one "best" way to teach, they do want all students to learn. Neoliberal thinking calls out to teachers—there must be one "best" way that will work for all children.

Parents participate as well. They wonder what they can do to make sure their children stay ahead of the game. Parents often ask what they can do with their children during the summer so they do not lose ground in school skills. When I suggested time to read independently and play board games with others as the most important experiences, they did not believe me. It was too simple. Parents typically wanted to enroll their children in a program, purchase a workbook, or hire a tutor. This continues into high school when parents enroll their children in test-prep programs for the SAT and ACT.

Schools have taught parents that test scores matter, not student interests, experiences, or materials. In the process, we are leaving many learners behind because we have fallen into the trap of believing that test scores will improve if we teach with textbooks through transmission. If we truly believe learning matters in school then schools and teachers must begin to think harder about what it is the learner wants to know. Learning begins with the learner, not with the stuff.

Making a Shift to Authentic Texts and Student-Centered Literacy

It is easy for schools to just purchase textbooks—they are expensive, but they contain enough material for an eight-hour school day for the entire school year. Teachers do not have to worry about finding materials or think about topics that interest students—in fact, they cannot. Richard L. Venezky reported that

schools have used textbooks to teach content since the early 17th century, and the colonists saw literacy as "not an end unto itself but an entrée to religious responsibility" (248) with content laced with the accepted religious ideals of the day. In school, children were not just becoming literate; they were learning important patriotic content and the orthographic standardization of English language that would make Americans sound alike. As Nila Banton Smith reported, aims to nationalize US citizens influenced both early reading materials and methods of reading instruction through standardization (34, 35). Strong similarities exist between educational goals in the early 17th century and now, as legislative agendas during both periods have encouraged a similar homogenization of students.

Today, the function of a textbook ranges from reading instruction in elementary classrooms to the study of literature in secondary and college classrooms. Although public school textbooks are not typically filled with prayers and creeds as they once were, "a narrow sterilized view of society and the child's role in it" (Venezky 248) continues to make them similar to the textbooks of old. Today, curriculum analysts such as Michael Apple still believe textbooks play a critical role in shaping students' social perceptions about the world.

Textbooks are compilations of stories and information that provide teachers and students with a body of knowledge on which to draw. Basal reading or literature textbooks usually come with an anthology of stories, leveled alternative texts, a teacher's manual, a series of practice workbooks, and assessments for determining growth or achievement. Carmen Luke, Suzanne de Castell, and Allan Luke addressed the authority of texts and focused "on the distinctive communicational constraints of both the school text and the classroom context" (111). Today, teachers continue to rely on textbooks as an authoritative voice they can depend on.

Looking at the table of contents in any reading or literature text identifies the reduction of reading to skills such as cause and effect, fact and opinion, making inferences, and various vocabulary exercises. Children are asked to make efferent responses to questions imposed on them by the text and teacher instruction is reduced to specific prompts scripted for the instructor. That is not the educational experience Dewey challenged educators to facilitate so long ago in classroom settings. It is not the type of educational experience that will empower learning for students or teachers.

This desire for stuff—called neoliberalism—is a belief in the free market as the savior of all social and political problems. As stipulated in former President Bush's No Child Left Behind policies, if children learn to read by the end of third grade they are more likely to be successful as productive citizens in the world. Unfortunately, reading on grade level does not ensure success. As Jacqueline Edmondson and Patrick Shannon remind us this "reading success equation" avoids discussion of whether or not there are enough jobs in the world that pay a living wage if everyone does read on grade level.

Textbooks not only impose experiences on students but also on the professionals who use them in their classrooms. If teachers begin with the stuff rather than the idea, the experience will be limited. But when classrooms contain 20–30 students, how do teachers start with every learner to differentiate instruction? And if you teach several sections of this many students, how will you differentiate for 100 or more?

When students are asked about their interests, social learning groups typically form. Learners want to work collaboratively on similar topics. Teachers who see themselves as facilitators also drive learning in particular ways. P. L. Thomas reminded us that completely open choice is often too difficult for students. Tethered choice—a teacher-facilitated offering of texts and ideas—worked better for his high school AP students when they selected literature for his course. He offered a limited number of texts based on ideas that students found interesting.

Organizing multiple texts with commonalities is another way to meet the needs of more than one student at a time. Think about what was in the news in Spring 2010: earthquakes rocked Haiti and Chile, a car loaded with explosive materials was found in Times Square, the unemployment rate soared during what many called the new Great Depression. Classrooms that incorporate reading and writing about concepts and ideas related to current events such as these will build productive and satisfied people. No textbook alone can manage this.

Schools must reconceptualize the way money for school materials is allotted and distributed in schools, so classrooms can create these types of learning experiences.

Dewey taught us that one of the most important parts of creating curriculum is knowing students well enough to connect them with the curriculum and strengthen their purposes for learning (*The Child*). Today, the NCTE Commission on Reading reminds us that to help students become literate, teachers must provide time, a variety of materials, and a plethora of methods. If we want all children to succeed, we must know literature and know what students like and want ("On Reading").

Perhaps that is where textbook learning most often goes awry. Every classroom of students is new and unique—teachers do not know their students until the school year begins; teachers cannot truly plan for their school year until they begin to know their students and work with them to create curriculum; no publisher can predict what a classroom of students wants or needs to learn ahead of time. Textbooks are problematic as the major reading source in classrooms.

And so, ideally and as teachers begin to know their students, materials are selected for students to read and consider. Teachers learn to know their students and develop learning relationships with them, and then the production and consumption of materials becomes obvious and important. As Romano reminds us, the relationship should drive the process of choosing materials. Other factors inform this process, too. Teachers also like to teach the texts they know—most teachers cannot think of going through a school year without teaching particular texts. When a teacher is passionate about an idea or text, that enthusiasm will likely drive learning.

School culture also shapes text choice and teacher decision-making about materials. Because of the current accountability-driven world of school, many schools choose textbooks as the preferred materials of choice. The problem is that while textbooks might offer a chapter or two from a text such as *Of Mice and Men,* multiple texts connected to one another by like concepts and ideas will encourage learners to think more deeply. For instance, in a study about economic depression, Dorothea Lange's easily accessible photographs from the Great Depression in the 1930s offer an opportunity for broadening discussion about what is happening currently in our world. A comparison of stock market figures from then and now might interest other learners, and Woody Guthrie's Dust Bowl ballads might interest still others. Organizing authentic texts in this way is dynamic and never static and can be created by classroom learners (students and teachers) together—authentic texts steeped in individual and group interests and abilities. That makes teacher decision-making in school important, and the materials teachers use to accomplish this type of learning informed by the questions and work of the students within experiences. And isn't that what we want? Learning for students and teachers offers real empowerment for all learners. Freire stated that real teacher empowerment includes "teachers' refusal to blindly follow prepackaged educational materials produced by some experts in their offices to unequivocally demonstrate their authoritarianism" (*Teachers* 8).

When a teacher is passionate about an idea or text, that enthusiasm will likely drive learning.

If your school district mainly uses textbooks for teaching, it is time to challenge that practice and empower all learners. The textbook must be our servant and not our master.

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Lilacs

It would be conspicuous, at least,
to call the lilacs ubiquitous,
but they are. No matter where I am,
this week, they balloon voluminous.
They wave to me. They wave to everyone,
of course, whether they come by or not.
They're generous that way. They say,
let's dispense with formalities,
such as the need roses have, or clouds,
to be talked to, to be reassured.
Unfussy and garrulous, preferring
sand to composted horse droppings,
they canvass broadly for happiness,
voting for whomever passes by
sampling the laden air, delicious
as the moment sleep slides up the bones.
Whole billowing bushes climb the sides
of houses. Ditches disappear
under a summer-long tsunami
of them, leaves like adders' tongues. How grand,
a bush of licking, continuous.
Sprays stand up along neglected edges,
deserted lots, insisting nothing
is the matter, matter itself being
little more than a wafting when you live,
ardent and wholly assiduous,
in a valley gone dizzy with lilacs.

—Roger Mitchell

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Roger Mitchell's latest book, *The One Good Bite in the Saw-Grass Plant,* is a book he started as an Artist-in-Residence-in-the-Everglades (AIRIE). Proceeds from this book will benefit the AIRIE program. He lives near the Canadian border in Jay, New York.

Innovative Writing Instruction

Practice Makes Perfect! Realizing Classrooms as "Landscapes of Learning,"[1] Not Places of Perfection

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Pressure for students to produce writing perfection in the classroom often eclipses the emphasis we place on the need for students to practice writing. "I cringe when I think of all the error accounting I did on Angie's paper," recalls Tom Romano (75) in a piece I recently shared with first-year teachers in my Teaching of Writing class. We read Romano's piece as a way to explore relationships between teaching strict form in writing and encouraging creative practice. Like many teachers, I hear my own uncertainty in Romano's struggle with Angie. And like many students, Angie epitomizes the difficulty that some teachers encounter "when [they] place periods and commas outside quotation marks instead of inside them" (75). Such difficulty is oftentimes met with the resolve we share with Romano to stop placing "primary emphasis in writing on grammar, usage, and punctuation" (74).

Romano's private battle publicly unveils the many challenges and opportunities teachers encounter as they help their students to master correctness while also developing their unique writing style (72–77). How, then, can classrooms adopt features of the writing workshop as well as serve as sites where experimentation, safe-risk taking, inquiry, and pride in one's work abound? What lessons can teachers take from the learning landscapes that exist outside the classroom walls, such as campsites, to challenge students' (and our own) attitudes about production and perfection? Like many of us, the novice teachers in my class held strong feelings about Romano's conflict; his lesson vocalizes our struggles with the teaching of writing, the decisions we face, and the conclusions we must ultimately reach.

Teachers as Students in my Classroom

Like ripples across calm water, hands in the air break the stillness; tension sparks debate, posturing, and defining: As I conclude my reading of Romano's vignette, a teacher in my class begins, "Traditional classrooms where spelling, grammar, and sentence structure are valued don't exist today." They represent the classrooms of my childhood and "shaped me into the successful adult today." Another teacher chimes in, "Progressive methods are a disservice to struggling students whose constant errors need correcting."

Other voices of teachers emerge, voices that echo "deficient-model" descriptions of classrooms where students "can't write a sentence" or where students "misspell every other word."

Another teacher exclaims, "It's important for seventh graders to be able to express themselves and be comfortable expressing themselves without having to be confined by the limits of grammar and other technicalities."

Frustrated, a male teacher adds, "Students need us to show them how to write so society will listen." This comment is followed by yet another, "Yes, students should be encouraged to write freely and not worry about making 'mistakes' and having papers handed back with red markings all over it; however, those same students should be able to express those thoughts and the most creative of ideas in a conventional and structured way."

Momentary silence permits the argument to settle; the confidence to

consider, retract, resist, and respond sets in: "No one element [in writing] is more important than the other," one teacher insists, referring to a balance between a focus on teaching form and teaching toward creative practice. This particular teacher continues by sharing, "As teachers we shouldn't put any greater emphasis on teaching students creative and artistic ways to write over the rules and more technical ways of writing, but instead we should teach the importance of mastering both."

An Age-Old Claim

Children hear the phrase "practice makes perfect" about as often as they scrape their knees or fall off their bikes. Casually spoken as motivation to "get up" and "get back on," the phrase gives hope and encouragement to the valued process of trial and error. Just as children build personal resilience through these learning experiences, a similar experiential growth in the classroom is possible. The "personal-growth model for teaching English," proposed at the 1965 Dartmouth Conference (Myers 4–5), articulated a debate alive in classrooms and teacher education programs throughout the discipline. Just as the conference attendees considered the validity of various models of mind and literacy, today's schools and teachers struggle to decide between emphasizing "skills" and "function" or "cultural heritage," or "the personal-growth model" based on the needs of individuals to find significance in their lives (Dixon 1–24).

In the years following the Dartmouth conference, educators applied theories of "personal growth" to language arts classrooms. James Moffett expressed the need for practice and opportunities to experience reading and writing as pedagogical methods in the curriculum. Central to Moffett's claim is the notion of "feedback and response," using writing as a tool rather than product (189–93). As a grade school student, my writing was as mechanical as pulling a lever on a slot machine—anyone can copy words from a board or fill in an outline—and the motions lacked a process from which actual skills could be learned. Hence, my early writing success and creativity were left up to luck, which should not be the case for students' learning, and, more specifically, their writing.

Moffett's view that student writers need "awareness" and "not rules" (202) is still a foreign concept in many schools that adhere to strict minilessons and curriculum guides filled with grammar and writing exercises. Fortunately for me, the "non-response" model that Moffett considers to "wither" the impulse to write only caused a delay in my development and not an overall destruction of my ability or ambition (198). I worry, though, about the experiences we create for other children and young adults in the absence of adequate time and space to practice writing and to practice being/becoming writers. In my worrying, I have begun to consider the value of other spaces—familial communities, recreational centers, campsites—that provide time for young people to experiment with the multiple meanings and practices of writing.

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Practice Fields

Writing for a special edition of *Teachers College Record,* Hope Jensen Leichter identifies a web of educational institutions, such as "places of work, association, neighborhood, friends, religious institutions, [and] museums" (624). Each of these institutions respectively contributes to the holistic development of our intellectual, cultural, social, and academic being, and much of this web exists beyond the walls of schools. Just as children go about the activities of learning in classroom settings, we recognize similar skills are acquired through experiences in other sites.

Philosopher of education Maxine Greene suggests meaningful learning experiences "cannot, of course, happen solely within the schools and through the agency of the schools" (123). These spaces, according to Greene, are created and lived in "living rooms, on playgrounds, in workplaces, studios, and waiting rooms" (123). These landscapes become the practice fields for children outside of school to experiment with safe-risk taking, pursue inquiry, and imagine new ideas. Why should classrooms ignore the lessons from authentic out-of-school sites that encourage young people to pro-

duce texts by employing a process-oriented approach, especially as this approach involves writing? In thinking through this question, I quickly turn to campsites as one example of an authentic out-of-school site that uses a process-oriented approach.

Camps and Classrooms

From the Latin word *campus* (for field) we find an etymological link between school campuses and campsites. These two institutions not only share a common root but together account for countless hours of engagement and influential experiences for American children and adults (Ozier 19). Camps have provided young people with outdoor experiences for 150 years. The early camps were founded to complement didactic schoolwork and to give youth opportunities to participate in nature, physical exercise, play, and adventure experiences. Families and places of worship come to mind as the only other structures surpassing the influence of camps and schools. By the early part of the 20th century, organized camping in the United States had become somewhat of an institution, and many of the early camp directors shared common values with progressive educators in recognizing the educational values of the summer camp experience. In his 1942 article "The Role of Camping in Education Today," William Heard Kilpatrick noted that "We learn what we live, only what we live, and everything we live," suggesting "[t]he camp can thus spread a more adequate ideal of education" (18–21).

Not since the "personal growth model" of the 1960s has there been a push to restore the value for "experiences" in the field of English education. Camp, however, has the capacity for aiding classrooms to imagine the spaces and traditional landscapes of learning differently. Ruth Vinz evokes an almost philosophical approach to this question of where learning takes place, imagining this to be a "constructing/producing site" in which we begin or attempt to understand what "interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, or transdisciplinary learning might mean" and how these places can be actualized in our classrooms. Occasion to work in this way requires the presence of adults with varied talents and interests who provide the passion and resources to "tutor . . . sensibilities" and "tease usual ways of looking at the world into new images of the possible" (42), as Herbert R. Kohl remembers the adults and mentors of his childhood doing. A concerted effort among those involved to emphasize process rather than outcome often sets learning in camp apart from other settings, primarily school settings, which continue to rely on high-stakes achievement tests to measure success.

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Proven Results

Youth have attended camp for a variety of reasons, and research suggests that camp participation affects youth in multiple ways by enhancing "affective (self-esteem and self-concept), cognitive (knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes), behavioral (self-reported behaviors and behavioral intentions), physical, social, and spiritual growth" (Powell et al. 50). More recent research (Thurber et al.) measured children's self-reports on the construct of adventure and exploration with a combination of items that primarily tapped into campers' willingness to try new things. On average, from pre-camp to post-camp, results from Thurber et al.'s research indicated statistically significant growth on items such as: "In the past week, I did a new activity" (camper survey) and "My child likes to try new things" (parent survey) (245). Like camps, classrooms should carry on a tradition of challenging children and young adults to try new activities, learn new skills, and get caught up in the excitement of feeling more competent.

However, six months after camp, young people's self-reported willingness to try new things appeared to have reverted to pre-camp levels, and parents reported a slightly less adventuresome spirit in their children than before camp. The marked pre-camp to post-camp differences, as well as the decreases in six months follow-up, may highlight the role of classrooms in persisting children with ordinary routines and expectations. Schools, too, can take the liberty, and challenge themselves,

to create robust courses of inquiry for children that value adventure and intellectual risk-taking. As students are encouraged to continue trying new things, thus taking ownership of their experiences, activating their inquisitiveness and relying on their own sense of motivation, teachers increase the likelihood of helping young people, to use Kohl's phrase, "to take conscious control of [their] own education" (50).

A Pursuit of Perfection Leaves a Nation at Risk

Recently, I was in a workshop with Sheridan Blau where he held up a book and said, "This is what's wrong with how we teach writing in schools," meaning that students who only read texts in their published form tend to believe that "writing just happens." We cannot hope for publications we use as classroom texts to serve as realistic models of the kinds of products we hope students will produce since they do not accurately represent the kind of process we want them to enjoy.

Our nation's obsession with standardized perfection was urged by the publication of *A Nation at Risk,* which led to an education reform wave known as the "excellence movement." Because of its sobering and grim prediction that America would soon be engulfed by a "rising tide of mediocrity," standards-driven instruction and rigorous accountability measures were adopted across the country. While standards and accountability themselves are not the issue, the emphasis on excellence and accountability should focus on the process just as much as the product. By placing "standards based work" on bulletin boards and final papers in portfolios without their earlier drafts, we send a confusing message to students and their teachers that only the final product is worthy.

Just as Angie reminded Tom Romano that his marks on her paper were a "voice silencer," potential opportunities for learning and "personal growth" are ubiquitous in classroom settings. Hence, they offer significant moments for children to explore, discover, appreciate, and experiment. The creation of such a space where possibility abounds for children—a space where new meanings and understandings can emerge—results from what Greene defines as the "risk of risking" (157). Occasions for students to choose, challenge, and reflect—to actually risk risking—are too often absent from conversations among students and teachers in countless English classrooms. Romano encourages us to move beyond the "error accounting" on student work by sincerely appreciating students' ideas as real and valuable, as truth, since students need time to negotiate the contradictions and complexities around writing with their peers and with adults. This negotiation can lead students to consider alternatives and identify compelling positions and lines of arguments that would enhance how, what, and why they write. Having a combination of risk and success in a space where students feel safe and comfortable with their attempts and mistakes at writing can yield greater achievement and more creative, meaningfully engaging products.

Change of Practice

As Romano asserts, whether or not teachers concentrate on every student error is "much ado about little" (75); however, considering classrooms as spaces for practice or perfection has much broader implications. Amid the classroom debates around writing with my own novice teachers that I described earlier, the residual effects of the ways teachers were taught in school powerfully overwhelm our desire to teach differently. Since institutional fences are the hardest to cross, ultimately the practices we place in our classrooms become the cross-section of what we know and want to produce. Approaching classrooms as places of experimentation and practice—much like the spaces of campsites—and not simply as sites that mirror perfection from our own "successful" school encounters allows teachers, in the words of Adrienne Rich, "not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (35).

Amid the classroom debates around writing with my own novice teachers that I described earlier, the residual effects of the ways teachers were taught in school powerfully overwhelm our desire to teach differently.

To look on education and our learning world through the lens of what Greene describes as "finished and predefined" is both dangerous and unfortunate. Progressive notions, indifferent to boundaries and commonly held barriers, are necessary to reach a level of comprehension with capacity to shape

more appropriate, innovative versions of teaching and learning—versions open to embracing and valuing all settings and the links that exist across these spaces. Acknowledging classrooms as landscapes for practice and personal growth can help teachers widen our view, particularly in relation to teaching writing.

Note

1. Adapted from the title of Maxine Greene's 1978 book, *Landscapes of Learning.*

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CEE Awards Announced

A number of awards were presented by the Conference on English Education at the NCTE Annual Convention in Orlando. **The 2010 James N. Britton Award** for Inquiry within the English Language Arts was presented to Cathy Fleischer and Sarah Andrew-Vaughan, *Writing Outside Your Comfort Zone: Helping Students Navigate Unfamiliar Genres* (Heinemann, 2009). **The 2010 Richard A. Meade Award** for Research in English Education was presented to Deborah Appleman, *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents,* 2nd edition (Teachers College Press/NCTE, 2009). **The 2010 Janet Emig Award** for Exemplary Scholarship in *English Education* was presented to Robert P. Yagelski, for his article, "A Thousand Writers Writing: Seeking Change through the Radical Practice of Writing as a Way of Being" (*English Education,* October 2009). **The 2010 Cultural Diversity Grants** went to Summer A. McLin for her proposal, "Adjusting the Color Lens: Changing Attitudes toward African American Vernacular English," and Bilal Polson for his proposal, "Primary Classroom Teachers' Awareness of Students' 'Literacy Lives.'" **The 2010 James Moffett Award** for Teacher Research was presented to Gretchen Bernabei, Alamo Heights High School, San Antonio, Texas, and Jeanetta Miller, Newtown High School, Sandy Hook, Connecticut.

Mentoring Matters

Taking an Empathic Stance

Too often, the school leaders who construct a school's master schedule and decide the teaching assignments for new teachers assign the newcomers the most difficult schedules. The difficulty might include multiple preparations for classes with the neediest and most-challenging students, and moves to three or four different classrooms throughout the school day (see, for example, Simmons). These difficult assignments convey a regrettable view of new colleagues as initiates who have to endure hardship to develop resiliency while earning a status that warrants a more humane experience.

When teachers or administrators look for mentor candidates, they should look for an inclination to react empathically toward others.

As someone who has researched the concerns of beginning teachers and has managed mentor programs in schools, I find the view of new teaching colleagues as low-status initiates disturbing, to say the least. I am calling here for an empathic stance toward new colleagues, recognizing a capacity for empathy as a key characteristic of an effective mentor. *Empathy* in this context means being able to put oneself in the place of the new teacher and being able to imagine vividly what he or she is experiencing. It means further that someone is able to connect emotionally with that experience and able to respond to that connection with understanding and compassion. This empathic stance is at the core of a mentor's role; when teachers or administrators look for mentor candidates, they should look for an inclination to react empathically toward others.

Tough Times for Teachers

These are tough times for teachers, who are under siege from several directions. *Newsweek* (Thomas and Wingert) directs attention at firing bad teachers but expresses skepticism about the profession entirely as lacking professional standards and systems for holding teachers accountable for high performance. "Race to the Top" grants have provided incentives for states to erode tenure protections and to tie teacher evaluation ratings to students' performance on state assessments. With school districts facing budget crises, class sizes have increased and faculties have been drastically reduced. Graduates from teacher-preparation programs are hard pressed to find jobs. A friend in a local school district reports that the district received 440 applications for two openings for teaching high school English; in some areas these odds probably look pretty good. I am tempted to suggest to my English education students that if they want to view the employment outlook for middle school and high school English teachers, they should look at scenes from *The Grapes of Wrath,* where the earnings of peach-pickers drop by half when hundreds of other willing workers arrive at the fruit ranch. To some policymakers this is the free-market competition they would like to see: few teaching positions and thousands of teachers eager to work for whatever they can earn. I am afraid that the vision from the secretary of education to the local school board is that teachers are quite expendable, and the ideal situation is one where the weakest contributor can be summarily dismissed and replaced by the next willing worker in line.

Citing recent research about the relative effects of teacher quality (Boyd et al.; Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor), Linda Darling-Hammond and David Haselkorn affirm that quality instruction from

well-prepared teachers has a greater impact on student achievement than "the effects of race and parent education combined." These studies affirm the primacy of teachers in improving schools, advancing learning, and fostering quality experiences for learners in the classroom. Teachers are hardly expendable. School districts make enormous investments in the recruiting, hiring, and induction of teachers, and the emphasis should be on encouraging development rather than searching for replacements each year. The effort toward professional development begins with an empathic spirit, that is, a sense of what less-experienced teachers must be feeling and what they will need to grow and to thrive.

Recognizing Our Needs and Our Basic Insecurities

I report elsewhere and in detail about the concerns of beginning teachers and the pattern of first-year experience (McCann, Johannessen, and Ricca). But I will draw from my own experience here to keep matters simple. After working for several years as a school administrator, I returned over the last year to teach again full-time. As I anticipated a schedule of university classes in English education, I had three basic concerns: Will my students like me? Will my colleagues respect my work? Will my supervisor find me adequate for the job? These might seem curious concerns for someone who taught for 25 years in high schools and universities, and the questions might reveal a lack of confidence. While I contended with these questions, I was also reading Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach.* Palmer offers this honest reflection:

> In unguarded moments with close friends, we who teach will acknowledge a variety of fears: having our work go unappreciated, being inadequately rewarded, discovering one fine morning that we chose the wrong profession, spending our lives on trivia, ending up feeling like frauds. But many of us have another fear that we rarely name: our fear of the judgment of the young. (47–48)

In reading this passage, I was reassured to see that Palmer, with years of university teaching experience, confessed to having the same doubts at the beginning of every term. For me, the revelation was that every teacher harbors these doubts to a greater or lesser extent during every year of teaching. We can well imagine, if we have any empathic power at all, that for the new teacher these doubts are exaggerated, or at least more keenly felt. These doubts erode confidence, turn attention to survival behaviors, and militate against professional growth.

Between Coddling and Hazing

Systems that place new teachers in the most vulnerable situation convey some corrosive attitudes about new colleagues. When new teachers are given the toughest teaching assignment and placed in the most difficult work environment, the situation implies that there is a caste system within the school: teachers with seniority enjoy the perks that they assume they have earned by virtue of their years of experience, and newcomers have to pay their dues to move up in status. The image of suffering through an induction process to prove worth and to earn status and reward sounds like a tradition of hazing practiced by some organizations, including the military, and banned in most schools as being too degrading for students. At the same time, novices cannot be protected entirely from experience and from the realities of working in schools. Whether we are officially assigned mentors or are simply concerned colleagues, our stance should be somewhere between hazing and coddling. This balanced position returns us to the empathic stance: understanding that the newcomers experience both exhilaration and apprehension, both eagerness and hesitation. Newcomers will be well served if their colleagues appreciate the doubts they have and work toward bolstering honest confidence while not taking delight in the novices' uneasiness.

What Colleagues Can Do to Help

A starting point for helping new colleagues is learning about their experience. The idea of a mentor is not to draw from one's experience and project it onto the newcomer in the form of distilled wisdom and authoritative directions for action. In taking an empathic stance, an experienced colleague will hear the newcomer's reports about areas of uncertainty. Listening in itself affirms that the teacher has reasonable doubts that anyone could have. Empathic mentors will recognize the new colleague's need for a feeling of efficacy, which can derive from

exploring options and from making a reasoned judgment about the best course of action. A feeling of efficacy does not derive from being told what to do and from having problems solved for you; instead, it grows from ownership of decisions and from the support of peers who reveal options and offer cautions.

Empathic mentors will also serve as advocates for their less-experienced colleagues. Advocacy might take the form of recommending a reasonable teaching schedule that will offer chances of success and will not prompt more doubts about the teacher's positive effect and value. Advocacy also means sharing resources; speaking well of the merits of our colleagues, where merit exists; and acknowledging the value of teaching as, indeed, the one element that makes a difference in school improvement and education reform.

A feeling of efficacy does not derive from being told what to do and from having problems solved for you; instead, it grows from ownership of decisions and from the support of peers who reveal options and offer cautions.

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Search for a New Editor of *English Journal*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *English Journal.* In July 2013, the term of the present editor, Ken Lindblom, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for her or his first issue in September 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *English Journal* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

Off the Shelves

"What Is This Thing Called a Vook?": Using *Skeleton Creek* to Transform Students' Reading Experiences In (and Out of) School

Susan Groenke, Robin Bell, Erin Allen, and Joellen Maples

Young Adult Literature Goes Digital with *Skeleton Creek*

There's a new kind of young adult novel in town: the digi-novel or "vook" (video-book), which combines traditional print-bound text with interactive online components. Patrick Carman's *Skeleton Creek* series is one such example of a "vook," and it proved to be popular with the eighth-grade students we read it with this year. We have written elsewhere (see Groenke and Maples) about how books such as *Skeleton Creek* epitomize the participatory and interactive nature of today's media convergence culture—a culture today's teens are helping to create and sustain. Here, we want to share what students have to say about reading a "vook."

Skeleton Creek (the first book in a two-volume series) centers on 15-year-old Ryan's and his best friend Sarah's exploits to solve a mystery surrounding their hometown of Skeleton Creek. How did the town get its name? Does it have anything to do with the old gold dredge in the woods? Or the miner, Old Joe Bush, who was killed in the dredge? Is the name "Skeleton Creek" a warning to outsiders—a warning to stay away?

The problem is, Ryan and Sarah can't stay away from the dredge, and on one late-night visit, Ryan is badly injured. While hospitalized, Ryan starts a journal where he reveals that he fears for his life, thinks his father may be in on the mystery surrounding Skeleton Creek, and wants his journal to serve as a record of events in case something happens to him.

Because Ryan's parents believe Sarah is the reason Ryan was hurt, they have forbidden Ryan and Sarah to see each other. In the age of the Internet, however, Ryan and Sarah can stay connected via the computer. Sarah is the film geek, described by the author as "Nancy Drew with a camera" (Jasics). She continues to look for clues and sends secret Web videos to Ryan when she discovers new information or makes connections. Readers access Sarah's videos intermittently throughout the novel by going to the website (http://www.sarahfincher.com) and using the passwords provided by Ryan in his journal. Once Ryan has watched the videos, he reflects on them in his journal and makes connections between what Sarah and he continue to find out about the dredge and the mystery surrounding their hometown.

Reading *Skeleton Creek*

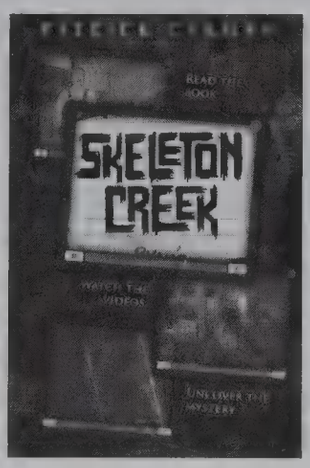
To "read" *Skeleton Creek,* readers must go back and forth between the book and the website. Carman has said in interviews that the idea behind the structure of the book/media hybrid was to create a "reading-plus experience" to actually compel readers (especially resistant, adolescent male readers) to read:

> [*Skeleton Creek*] is probably the best attempt I can think of to give a young person a reason to want to read. They only have to read 20 or 30 pages and then they get to watch part of the story—and so that's the idea, they go back and forth, and that's why I structured it this way because I want, particularly that age group—5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th graders—to just be compelled to have to keep going. If you read the first 30 pages and watch the first video, it's almost impossible not to keep going. You understand the structure, you're right into the story, something scary is happening. (Jasics)

It *is* impossible not to keep going, as we found out with the eighth-grade students we read *Skeleton Creek* with this year.

What Students Have to Say about Skeleton Creek

Our students loved the *Blair Witch*–like creepiness of Sarah's videos. (One day, when we heard students screaming in the classroom next door, another student said, "Oh, they must be reading *Skeleton Creek.*") Our students said the videos motivated them to read because, as one student noted, "You have to read to understand the movie parts," and "it keeps you wanting to continue turning the page to find out more." Many students also liked the visual element the videos provided because they liked "[seeing] what's happening" and "what the characters are like," and felt the videos "[enhanced] the terror." One student commented that the videos "add another level of depth," while another student explained that he sees the hybrid book as a natural progression from traditional books with pictures: "Back then, we had pictures with words in books. Now we have videos with words." Another student said he liked the "visual perspective" because "it's almost like a moving graphic novel," and another student said, "It's a great way to get information across the way we like to get it." Yet another student commented that the "videos explain parts of the story that the book doesn't give you."



Why Teachers Will Like Skeleton Creek, Too

Teachers also have reasons to like *Skeleton Creek.* At the simplest level, our students loved the mystery and adventure, which kept them engaged (ghost stories and adventure are preferred genres of teens, according to Christina Clark and Kate Rumbold). Students *wanted* to keep reading (even those self-professed, too-cool book-haters). As one student wrote in a reading response about the book, "If teachers used these kind of books when I was in kindergarten, I would be better at reading." Another student said, "I already want to read the second one." Other student comments included, "This is the best book we've read as a class all year"; "I have noticed that in class people have enjoyed reading more"; and (our personal favorite) "This book shows that books that are long can be very good and not boring." Undoubtedly, we've seen students engaged with reading in ways we haven't seen during much of the year. Robin noted several times that for many of the students in her class who struggle with reading, *Skeleton Creek* was the first whole book they'd ever read.

We also like *Skeleton Creek* because we found it has a range of readability and was thus accessible to all of our eighth-grade readers. We read the book with a range of classes (remedial–honors) with equal success. While some readers stayed engaged at the level of the scary, who-dun-it mystery and plot, other readers appreciated the allusions to Edgar Allan Poe and other popular cultural icons referenced in Sarah's passwords. Still other readers were intrigued by the new mode of storytelling and expressed a desire to create their own "vooks." As one student explained, "I thought it was going to be a simple little mystery book, but it is far more than that."

We taught prediction and inference skills with the book and worked on identifying important details and summarizing. The book also lends itself well to character analysis, as students struggled over whether or not Sarah is reckless and thus dangerous, and whether or not Ryan is cowardly or cautious. Students also struggled to decide if Sarah is a good friend to Ryan. At one point in the book Ryan says being friends with Sarah makes him a liar, and his relationship with Sarah is certainly fraught with tension throughout the book.

As we read the book, we kept a character chart posted in the room (a T-chart with "Ryan" in the left-hand column and "Sarah" in the right). We listed adjectives for each character as we finished a book/video section, and we also discussed what adjectives we could cross out and delete now that we knew more about the characters. This led to good discussion, as not all students agreed as to what could be deleted.

Michael W. Smith and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm explain that under-

standing characters is an ongoing process of making inferences and judgments, and then reevaluating your original inferences and judgments once you know more about the characters. We practiced this process in class, making judgments about Ryan and Sarah as we read. This helped us develop deeper understandings of each of the characters and see characters as more than technical vocabulary words to be defined for a test. When we were done reading the novel, students picked one character and an adjective from our class-generated T-chart and developed a character analysis using evidence from both the book and video to support their claims.

One student described Ryan as a "good friend" in her essay. She wrote:

> He is a really good friend to Sarah because he helps her when she needs it. He's very protective of Sarah. One day he called her house to make sure she didn't go back to the dredge and the mother answered instead of Sarah and he said, "I woke up worried about Sarah. I don't know why, but could you do me a favor and make sure she is ok?"

Another student described Sarah as a "big risk-taker." He wrote:

> Sarah is most of all a big risk-taker. She goes to the old, mysterious, broken, falling apart dredge alone. She goes in the middle of the night when she can hardly see. She makes contact with Ryan when she shouldn't. She even says at one point, "It's risky contacting you like this."

Finally, we like the book because we witnessed it extend students' reading experience beyond the classroom walls. Intrigued by the book, students bought their own copies and logged on at home or library computers to view the videos. Several students joined the Facebook Skeleton Creek community and participate in the fan blog sites that have sprouted up around the book (e.g., http://skeletoncreekisreal.com).

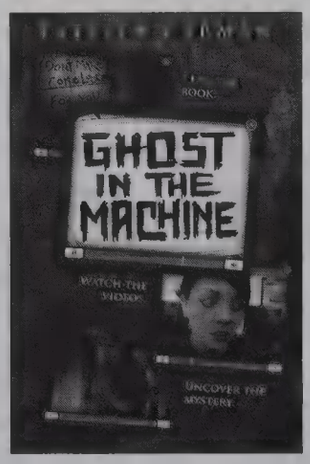
Bridging the Digital Divide with Digi-Novels

Literacy researchers have long called on teachers to find ways to bridge the "digital divide" that exists between in-school and out-of-school technology use, and we believe *Skeleton Creek* affords opportunities for teachers to do just that. We bought one class set of the novel, read it aloud to students, and accessed the websites on a class computer (the Sarah Fincher website at http://sarahfincher.com is not blocked by our school's security filter). This, we believe, encouraged a social, communal feeling toward the reading activity—a feeling that literary researchers explain draws young people online. As students ventured online at home to read more about *Skeleton Creek,* they returned to the classroom eager to share what they found, and we let them, adding their findings to our collective knowledge about the book and its mystery. In these small ways, *Skeleton Creek* certainly seemed to help bridge the digital divide between us and our students. We are already considering other ways we can include digital literacies in future implementation. We like Sara Kajder's ideas for students writing their own fan fiction or "multimodal" texts and possibly chatting about the book with students in other states.

Some Criticisms about Digital Reading

Even with all this positive news about the video-book, there will be doubters. Some reading researchers worry that "vooks" may hinder one's ability to read longer, sophisticated texts that require sustained reading. We didn't see students' attention spans thwarted as a result of reading *Skeleton Creek.* In fact, as we've mentioned earlier, many students considered *Skeleton Creek* a "long" book, and for some, it was the first whole novel they'd ever finished. We think we can build on successes like these by encouraging students to try longer texts when the time is right.

Still others worry about the loss of the "transportive appeal" of traditional texts, as images of characters are immediately available to readers in books with accompanying videos (Peters). Some reading researchers worry that "vooks" might do all of the imagining for readers. But as one student explained, "I always love to imagine certain parts from books when I'm reading. This book lets you see what you want to see and what the author wants you to see. You get the best of both worlds." Another student explained, "The visuals help for when you can't picture something too well. It makes most of the scenes for you." Three students did complain about the videos, however. One student said she preferred the "old-fashioned way, where you can imagine for your-



self what the characters look like," and another said she already gets "mental pictures that run like a movie through my head," and thus didn't need the videos. Yet another student said, "If all books end up like this, I won't read as much because it takes away from the imagination." Again, we feel the book is good for all levels of readers precisely because it does provide images for those readers who may not make "mental pictures in their heads," and it also provides contrasting images for more sophisticated readers to juxtapose against the images they create as they read.

Carman claims that *Skeleton Creek* "plays along with the way the [multi-tasking] young mind operates" (Jasics), but some neuroscientists suggest multitasking while reading (e.g., moving from print to computer screen) slows the brain down and increases the room for errors in comprehension (Hesse). We asked students to weigh in on this as well. Most said they liked the back-and-forth reading experience. One student explained, "I do love to read and be on the computer, and this combines both." One student said, however, that he'd "rather just read a book or watch a movie, and not do them together." Another student said, "I don't like that books are going digital. Books are meant to be on paper, not video." Several students commented that only people with access to the Internet could read *Skeleton Creek,* and that didn't seem fair.

All in all, we're here to say that we saw some magic occur in our classrooms as a result of reading *Skeleton Creek.* Readers—of all ability levels—were engaged and reading and talking about the book. News of *Skeleton Creek* at our school went viral. Strangers showed up at our doors wanting to know what this thing called a "vook" was. We think Patrick Carman's on to something, and we—and our students—are anxiously awaiting our next "vook" reading experience.

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Research for the Classroom

George Hillocks Jr. is a scholar and teacher whose work has shaped our understanding of writing instruction. As the field of education is increasingly permeated by standardized, high-stakes assessments, Hillocks continues his efforts to help teachers provide students with empowering and meaningful writing activities. In his newest book, Hillocks presents a student-centered rationale for teaching narrative writing and detailed, explicit guidelines for excellent writing instruction. Susan R. Krickovich and David A. Gorlewski's review offers both a context for this book as well as a glimpse of its concrete application in the classroom.

Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching

George Hillocks Jr. Portsmouth: Heinemann. 2007. 164 pp. $19.50.
ISBN: 978-0-325-00842-4.

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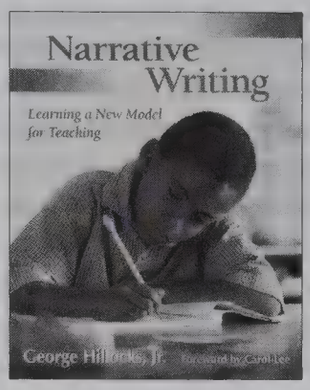
Reading a book that speaks to you about what you value in practice reminds you why you chose to become an English teacher.



George Hillocks Jr.'s *Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching* is nothing less than a blueprint for teaching narrative writing—a blueprint that honors both the student and the teacher. With over 30 years of experience in diverse urban schools, Hillocks underscores the power of teacher decision making by providing instructors with an in-depth overview of how to teach narrative writing to adolescent students. That overview features answers to these and other questions: Why should we teach narrative writing? What is a good personal narrative? How can we teach students to write powerful dialogue, write about inner thoughts and feelings, and provide them with the tools to write about people, action, scenes, and settings? How can we teach students to revise their writing? Finally, and perhaps most critically, how can we encourage students to develop dispositions that support powerful, meaningful composition?

Hillocks's current work must be viewed within the context of his overall contributions to the teaching of writing. Two of his earlier works ("What Works in Teaching Composition: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental Treatment Studies" [1984] and *Research on Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching* [1986]) were characterized by three distinct elements: First, they represented attempts to describe various modes of writing instruction. Second, they provided quantitative data related to effectiveness strategies such as grammar instruction, freewriting, sentence combining, etc. And third, the density of the statistical findings delighted scholars but made them relatively inaccessible for classroom teachers.

In this text, Hillocks replaces discussions based on "mean effects," "confidence intervals," and "standard deviations" with concrete examples of how to teach every aspect of the personal narrative. At the outset, he acknowledges that most teachers teach narrative composition because it appears on state assessments of writing. However, scoring guides used by many states lack the specificity needed to assess the

important qualities found in a good personal narrative. Standardized assessment-based criteria are not effective for instructional purposes. Hillocks subsequently defines *his* three criteria: *specificity, style,* and *(episodic) elaboration.* He believes that rubrics should be used before, during, and after writing to evaluate gains and to help inform instruction (15). In addition, the book presents samples of student work in which each criterion is rated and rationales for scores are provided.

Hillocks sets the stage for his new model of teaching narrative writing by discussing "why" and "how" to teach narrative. He begins by demonstrating how powerful narrative pieces can illustrate the ways in which the stories of our life come to define our sense of identity. Personal narrative writing helps us to reflect on important experiences and ground these within the context of our lives. Hillocks believes that narrative is an integral part of the writing curriculum; however, teachers need to focus on strategies that make writing effective, using concrete details that reflect a strong sense of audience. Hillocks asserts that explicit attention to these characteristics in literature will help students conceptualize and identify connections between reading and writing that will enhance their performance in both areas. Hillocks proposes a new model of teaching writing in meaningful contexts and provides examples of activities that meet his criteria of being concrete, engaging, strategic, student-driven activities that create "flow experience" for students and teachers (13).

Along the Continuum: Teacher Centered to Student Centered and Back Again

Perhaps the strongest message delivered by Hillocks in this text is his recognition that good teaching (like good coaching in sports) consists of much more than *directing* students to complete a task. The first step to becoming a good writing teacher involves determining where students are in terms of skills and interests. His proposed initial writing activity is simple. He asks students to "[w]rite a story about an event that is important to you for some reason. Write about it in as much detail as you can so that someone reading it will be able to see what you saw and feel what you felt" (30). In addition to assessing a range of writing skills (voice, use of detail, style, word length, etc.), this activity sends a powerful message to students. Hillocks explains: "we want [the students] to see that they have stories to tell about their own lives, stories that are worth telling because they will be of interest to others" (30). In essence, through this activity, Hillocks is teaching something that is not quantifiable: He is enhancing the students' *disposition* to write. Without the disposition to write, the skills related to writing seem meaningless to students. In fact, the importance of fostering the disposition to write (and read) permeates every aspect of this book. For example, Hillocks organizes collaborative groups of students around the question, If you were making a movie of this story, how would you set up the scenes for the camera? Note that *student*-generated ideas serve as the focal point. This represents just one of scores of examples from the text in which student choice and product development emanate from a carefully designed *teacher* structure.

Perhaps the best example of a teacher-developed structure is the series of questions Hillocks asks his students to answer relative to their narratives. They include questions related to setting, characters, initiating action, results, and dialogue—among others. The questions essentially provide a checklist for the young authors to consider as they generate ideas throughout the composition process. In addition, the ideas are consistent with the principles of student self-assessment.

Historically, approaches to writing instruction seem to fall into one of two camps. The first, which Hillocks, in his earlier works, called the "Presentational Mode" of writing instruction, involves the teacher as (primarily) presenter of information, ideas, and guidelines. This approach has gained momentum during this era of high-stakes testing. The second approach is more student-centered and is marked by freewriting, student-based audiences, and collaboration. Teachers provide guidance and feedback, but they do not create structured writing activities. Hillocks called this the "Natural Process Mode."

Hillocks's early work, however, identified a third category, which he labeled the "Environmental Mode" of writing instruction. This mode was characterized by student choice supported by specific objectives, structured collaboration on specific tasks, and materials, problems, and activities selected by the

teacher. The meta-analysis Hillocks conducted revealed that the Environmental Mode was significantly more effective than either the Presentational Mode or the Natural Process Mode. In short, *Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching* is the practical, classroom-based manifestation of Hillocks's Environmental Mode—a concept he laid out nearly 30 years ago. As such, the text is theoretically substantial *and* rich with feasible strategies.

Classroom teachers will find many "how-to" features in this book. Among the most detailed (in terms of daily lesson planning) are the activities designed to help students create effective dialogue; write about inner thoughts, feelings, and sensations; write about scenes and settings; and write about people and action. Each of the chapters devoted to these strategies follows Hillocks's fourth General Principle (of the Five General Principles for Planning and Teaching) in that activities for student writers progress from teacher-led to group work and, finally, to independent writing (56). The five principles are an essential component of Hillocks's model and, as Carol Lee suggests in the book's foreword, they represent pedagogy that can be transferred to other domains to help both novice and experienced teachers.

Helping Students Revise Their Writing

Hillocks's teacher-developed, student-centered activities also include specific recommendations for teaching students how to revise their writing. Readers of this text will learn a great deal about the complex nature of the revision process. The discussion includes a nuanced definition of *revision* and clarifies the importance of differentiating between revising and editing. In addition, Hillocks explains the challenge of revision by invoking Marlene Scardamalia and Carl Bereiter, who he says "argue that the failure to revise might lie with problems in the production system. Their model posits an 'executive routine' for switching from generating text to assessing it. However, because writing is so complex, making that switch from generating to critiquing may be very difficult for children" (126).

Despite countless hours spent teaching and assessing writing, most classroom teachers are unable to fully articulate the multifaceted nature of revision. Fortunately, Hillocks offers an explicit description of revision coupled with clear strategies for practitioners. He reduces the revision process to three distinct types: adding, cutting, and rearranging. In addition, he provides a checklist of questions for students to consider as they revise.

Part of the traditional approach to helping students revise their work consists of teachers' written comments on students' papers. Hillocks notes that research on teacher comments indicates that "students receiving negative criticism [write] less and [develop] negative attitudes about themselves as writers and about writing as an activity" (76; brackets in original). Hillocks's advice is clear: The most effective written responses are focused (i.e., text specific), positive, short, and related to previous teaching. He writes, "If I have not taught the skill or concept related to my comment, I try not to make it" (77).

In this era of standardization, high-stakes assessments, and teacher deprofessionalization, Hillocks's most powerful message is that teachers (still) have the power to create positive learning environments in which students can take control of their literacy by composing compelling, meaningful narratives. Readers of Hillocks's *Narrative Writing: Learning a New Model for Teaching* will marvel at both the simplicity and the substance of his framework. EJ

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Success with ELLs

Developing and Shifting Perspectives

A School Visit

It was an early day in late September, and New York City was at its best. The oppressive heat and humidity of summer was gone. There was a crisp snap to the air, and the trees were just beginning to show a kiss of the fall colors to come. As I parked my car and waited to enter the high school where I would be observing one of the TESOL teaching interns in the graduate TESOL Program at Lehman, I reviewed the notes and the lesson plan that I had been sent by this teacher. Our program leads to New York State certification in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at the preK–12 grade level.

Since we are a graduate program, many students are already certified in either a secondary subject area or hold a K–6 or Special Education certification and are acquiring both a master's degree and an additional certification in TESOL. As part of our MSEd TESOL program, we visit these already certified teachers in their classroom four times during their practicum semester, and this was my second visit to this particular classroom. The teacher who I would be observing was teaching a ninth-grade English class that contained about 30% ELLs who were at the beginning and intermediate levels of proficiency (as determined by the New York State assessment for ELLs). The lesson revolved around *The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rainforest* by Lynne Cherry. Over my years of supervising student teachers and teaching interns, I had observed many lessons where teachers used this book. Some were innovative and motivating, others more traditional and, for lack of a better term, quieter. I was fond of the book and knew it well. As I read through this teacher's lesson I saw that it was part of a larger thematic unit that included the use of a WebQuest (http://www.webquest.org). Students researched the Amazon and rain forest depletion, focusing on Brazil, and read a 2002 article on the accelerating deforestation that was occurring in this region (http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/01/020115075118.htm). I was pleased by the teacher's integration of supplemental, authentic materials that would bring this text to life and help the students make connections between the text and their lives.

The ELLs in this class were mostly at the advanced beginner level, and like many in this region, their oral language development was much more advanced than their literacy abilities, a situation that can often lead teachers to have expectations in terms of these students' reading and writing ability that are not realistic in light of their actual proficiency levels. Because of the lower levels of proficiency among many of the ELLs, the teacher had provided opportunities for students to explore the concepts through listening and viewing, as well as reading and writing. In addition, the teacher was implementing a strategy that had been introduced in one of the TESOL methods courses in our program: a RAFT writing activity. RAFT is an acronym for Role, Audience, Format, and Topic. Teachers develop this assignment so that students have a variety of choices when it comes to engaging in writing activities. Students select the role they take as the writer, the audience to whom they are writing, the format of the writing (journal entry, PowerPoint presentation, memo, persuasive essay, letter, etc.), and the topic about which they will write. Usually the teacher develops a number of choices that the students may select and write individually or in collaborative groups (well suited for a presentation-type writing activity). I was pleased to see that this teacher would be focusing on writing in this class since writing

in general can be an underemphasized skill because it is such a demanding task for ELLs. Research has shown that, especially with ELLs at the lower levels of English proficiency, like those in this class, issues related to second language proficiency can overwhelm students' writing processes and cause a complete breakdown for learners (Bereiter and Scardamalia).

This RAFT strategy works well for ELLs in that it allows them to select writing formats and topics with which they have familiarity and use the English language skills that they have developed to "show what they know," as opposed to perhaps struggling with a type of writing with which they are not yet ready to engage. Integrating such writing choice may allow ELLs to get beyond that total breakdown of process and engage in the task not only because the format they select may be less intimidating than a traditional essay but also because such writing activities are motivating. Research over the years has pointed to relevant and meaningful (authentic) writing tasks being motivating for learners because of the strong connections that the writers can make to their lives and experiences (Mayher; Mlynarczyk). Writing activities such as the RAFT strategy can be a way to build that much-needed relevance and authenticity for all students, and especially target the language needs and draw out the unique background experiences of the ELLs in the classroom. Moreover, such a writing project allows for authentic assessment because the teacher is able to assess content knowledge rather than knowledge of a particular rhetorical structure.

FIGURE 1. RAFT Elements

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC
Environmental scientist	Grant funding organization	Proposal	To conserve rain forest through educational efforts with the local people
Tree frog	Middle and high school children	Persuasive letter	Why you should care about rain forest depletion and habitat destruction
Explorer	Public television viewers	20-minute documentary script	What the explorer found on a two-week journey in the Amazon rain forest
Photojournalist	Nature magazine subscribers	Photo essay/ PowerPoint presentation	Documenting rain forest depletion

While students, ELLs and native speakers alike, should be developing skills in all writing types, the RAFT provides an opportunity for teachers to scaffold and differentiate instruction and engage in informal assessment of students' knowledge of a particular topic. The RAFT in this case had the elements shown in Figure 1.

And the Bell Rings

The classroom included abundant student work adorning the classroom walls and learning centers that included a listening center, a resource center, a computer center, and an art center. From my work with this particular teacher, I knew that she believed that learners need a variety of ways in which to experience the content they are investigating. Her weekly reflective journal entries during this teaching practicum included examples of how students in her classroom would listen to newscasts or music that was contemporary to a work of fiction the class was currently reading, listen to a podcast on a topic that was addressed in the text or watch a film or television news clip, or how they would create book jackets or dioramas or illustrate a scene from the text in the art center. The classroom was a busy, well-organized, and inviting place.

The teacher distributed the RAFT handout and gave students some time to engage in a think, pair, share where they thought about what role they would select and why. Then they would partner with a peer and discuss their ideas, and finally, the pairs shared their conclusions with the whole class about the role they would assume and why they made that choice (making connections between their prior learning and the task at hand). Once this was completed, the teacher asked the students to get into groups based on the role they selected. There were groups of tree frogs, environmental scientists, photojournalists, and explorers. The groups were to discuss some of the ways they might go about completing their assignment (planning for the writing activity).

One group, a group of explorers, caught my attention. The group consisted of six students, four of whom were ELLs. One of the English language learners, Paolo, was from Brazil. He was agitated and becoming more animated, using all of his emerging English skills to communicate his point to his group members. As I listened to the group's discussion, I realized that his father had been involved in rain forest depletion when they lived in Brazil. He had worked at a lumber camp. This was Paolo's family's only means of support. This student was trying to explain that while cutting the forest was bad, his father had no choice. He needed the job. The teacher came over and became part of this group and mediated the discussion. She told the students that she would think about what Paolo had shared. The bell rang and students left the class, RAFT assignments in hand.

Debriefing

After the students left the teacher and I discussed Paolo's contribution to the group. She was at a loss. She hadn't thought of rain forest depletion as anything but bad, as anything but something that had to be stopped. She had never considered the people, some of whom were essentially powerless, on the other side of the issue. While she still believed this issue was a wrong that had to be righted, regardless of the position Paolo and his family had been in, she realized that a different approach should be taken. We discussed ways that she could help her students step into the shoes of someone like Paolo's father, and ways in which she could invite students to share their stories, facilitating the development of multiple perspectives on issues under discussion, which can lead to a greater understanding of the issue.

Including the Perspective of ELLs

Many English language learners come from developing nations. Many of these countries suffer from water-quality and air-quality problems and the depletion of natural resources and animal habitats. The argument that some of these governments engage in, when participating in global discussions of curbing these practices, is that the United States and other industrialized nations were guilty of many of these same infractions during their industrialization. Now, sitting in a different place, but perhaps still in a glass house, these developed governments throw stones at nations who are following the same developmental path. While we should not advocate environmentally detrimental practices, we can be sensitive to students from these countries. We can be careful not to adopt a dogmatic stance or to condemn a people for these actions. Through the use of literature and carefully constructed classroom activities, we can develop a number of perspectives that provide students with a nuanced understanding of a complex issue.

Researchers have discussed the important role that "giving students opportunities to explore controversial issues in an open, supportive classroom atmosphere" (Hahn 470) plays in providing opportunities for students to develop diverse perspectives on a variety of topics. It provides students the opportunity to walk in each other's shoes and examine issues from someone else's point of view. Adopting or considering multiple perspectives on difficult and controversial topics engenders cognitive dissonance, and through cognitive dissonance we become open to new ideas.

English language learners can be excellent resources for developing multiple perspectives in the ELA classroom. By drawing on their backgrounds and integrating their experiences into the mainstream classroom we can raise awareness of different ways of seeing the world and help all students develop multiple perspectives on a variety of topics. In doing so, we celebrate the gifts all students bring to the table.

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The Dream Deferred: How "College and Career Readiness" Looks from Below

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Apparently the current mission of secondary education in the United States is to prepare students for the next level of education, whatever that may be. The notion of "College and Career Readiness" is as amorphous as it sounds, and it overshadows the essential goals of the arts, humanities, and sciences. It dismisses the immediate relevance of learning and undermines the belief that success can be about current priorities and age-appropriate goals. Education is defined by what it can accomplish in the remote future, not in the present.

The drafted "Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies and Science," currently offered as national benchmarks for K–12 education, builds on the shadowy notion of "College and Career Readiness" to the point that every grade's standards are calibrated starting from the hypothetical knowledge of a student entering a postsecondary institution or career. As the introduction to the "Standards" claims, "Whether guiding third graders through a science unit or high school sophomores through a work of literature, teachers can look to the same CCR Standards—included in each section of this document—to help judge whether students are on course for being college or career ready" (1). This is the discourse of the "dream deferred."

As much as the backward mapping of the curriculum can increase continuity over the span of K–12 education, it diverts the attention of both student and teacher from the immediate consequences of learning. Students should know the value of reading and writing in the present, so they are not forever prodded by deferred goals such as admission to the college of their choice.

The discourse of the dream deferred, rather than inspiring students to prepare for the future, often promotes disillusionment with the present. It could be blamed for increased dropout rates or declining test scores over the span of grades 7 through 12. Students become convinced of the irrelevance of secondary schooling, and that they are only *preparing* for life, rather than living. Every learning goal is seen through the prism of adulthood and how it will transform them into sophisticated and respectable citizens, displacing their shallow and futile adolescence.

High school teacher Tim Gillespie recalls a conversation with a favorite student about her frustrating college admission essay. She was agonizing about "how to impress the college admissions committee."

> "Well don't worry about that," I said offhandedly in our writing conference. "Just tell your story, get at the truth about who *you* are." She looked at me, turned her head sideways, said "Oh," then wiggled around for a couple more minutes before I realized she didn't want to talk anymore, but to head off to the library to write. Later Katie told me it was a great day when she decided that, for a writer, it was more important to be honest than to sound smart. (18; italics in original)

The discourse of the dream deferred robbed the voice of the young adult writer. Katie should not have been imagining herself in an advanced stage of success in her writing. She should have been addressing her present questions and how they could change what she thought in the past. It is not so much a visionary goal for learning, but an active,

forceful approach that puts learning in a meaningful context.

I have heard myself tell high school students, "You'll need to know this for college." Usually it was something I disliked teaching as much as they disliked learning it. I have heard middle school teachers making the same claim about what their students should know for high school, and just recently I read that a fifth-grade teacher told her class, "'This is how you research,' and 'This is how you cite sources,' because 'the students are expected to know how to write in these ways' in junior high and high school" (qtd. in Whitney et al. 215). There are many meaningful reasons for giving credit to a source, but only one of them is for some future academic requirement. I imagine we could find examples of this kind of dream-deferred discourse up and down the educational ladder.

In Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem," the dream is of success in America, but it is unattainable for certain classes and races for lack of opportunity. The humane American response to this injustice is to create opportunities. But another response is to frame dreams as intermediate goals, goals that make sense today, not only for the future. Katie had to frame her college essay about who she was at that moment, not about who she might be if she were admitted to the college of her choice. This wasn't an impoverished goal for a struggling writer; it was a realistic goal for a superior writer. It was an expression of "now" that made sense to Katie, not a dream of "then," with its imagined expectations.

The discourse of the dream deferred is almost as unrealistic for many secondary students as the American Dream can be for the underprivileged of society. It sets an ambivalent stance of living for the future and substitutes the affectation of learning for genuine learning. It turns scholastic achievement into a random accumulation of artifacts of success. It makes imposters of students and teachers alike.

And like the discourse of the American Dream, the discourse of "College and Career Readiness" is vaunted by those who have already achieved it. It vindicates the haves against the insufficiency of the have-nots. Every day it reminds the have-nots of what they lack and how far the goal remains. In the guise of promising power, it highlights the imbalance of power. Student have-nots are compelled to labor for the future in the same way entry-level workers are compelled to endure substandard wages in hope of future promotion. Some are promoted; many are not.

The amorphous goal of "College and Career Readiness" may sound visionary, but it creates a kind of far-sightedness, in the optical sense of the word. We see clearly at a distance, but not so well the students and the age-appropriate goals in front of us. The Common Core State Standards are based on an imaginary college candidate or job applicant, not on the students we teach in the K–12 classroom. The discourse of the "dream deferred" distorts our vision of literacy and disheartens the students we actually teach.

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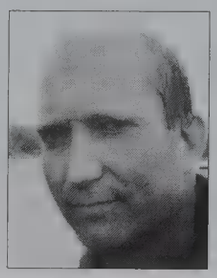
Bill Tucker taught high school English for 20 years before going to Eastern Michigan University as a teacher educator. Since 1993 he has taught English methods classes and graduate classes in the teaching of English. Since 2000 he has been director of the Eastern Michigan Writing Project.

NCTE Literacy Education Advocacy Day 2011: April 28

Join NCTE members from across the nation for NCTE's Literacy Education Advocacy Day on Thursday, April 28, 2011. NCTE members attending Advocacy Day will learn the latest about literacy education issues at the federal level and have a chance to interact with people highly involved with those issues. See http://www.ncte.org/action/advocacyday for details.

Paper Tiger



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Few of us pay much attention to the amount of paper used in our schools, but copy machines and printers spit out a constant stream, more than ever before. No more hand-cranked ditto machines turning out warm, pungent, blue-inked worksheets, though; there's been real progress. Today's copiers—there are two in my school's AV room—do everything: fold, staple, make booklets and two-sided copies, even print from remote locations. But these machines are hulking things, big enough to seem like they'd be dangerous if you turned your back on them. Each one is five and a half feet long and more than three feet high, which, if you leave off the tail, is roughly the size of an average specimen of *Panthera tigris tigris,* the Bengal tiger.

© Dynamic Graphics/Photos.com

If it's hungry, a Bengal tiger can eat up to 60 pounds of meat in a single night, but that's nothing compared to the industrial appetite of the copy machines and printers at my school. During the school year these voracious behemoths consume 286,000 sheets of paper every month, which adds up to almost 3,000 pounds of paper.

Three thousand pounds is about what six adult specimens of *Panthera tigris tigris* would weigh if you could find a scale big enough to fit them all on, and someone stupid enough to try it.

Teachers everywhere are always competing for copier time, rolling out endless stacks of tests and handouts. We come in before school or during lunch. We stay late. We wait in lines, rolling our eyes and looking at our watches and aiming suspicious glances at anyone who copies too much, or too slowly. Everyone seems harried and a bit desperate because time's always running out. There's a perennial vulnerability to teaching that makes us want to arm ourselves with pages and pages of handouts, even though we know that many of these handouts will end up scattered on the floor at the end of class in a clutter of empty Powerade bottles and candy wrappers.

Unlike school copy machines, Bengal tigers routinely go several days between meals.

If you take 286,000 sheets of paper—a month's supply at my school—and stack them up, you get a tower of paper 95 feet high. Take those same 286,000 sheets of paper, cut them into strips an inch wide, then line up all the strips end-to-end and tape them together, and you get a strip of paper 422 miles long. Get in your car and start driving 60 miles an hour, and it will take you almost four and a half hours to get to the end of the strip.

But the school year lasts nine months—that's a stack of paper as tall as the Washington Monument with a 30-story building balanced on top. Or enough paper for an inch-wide strip stretching from my northwestern Wisconsin school to Brazil. Imagine a 30-year teaching career and you're talking

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about a one-inch strip long enough to wrap four times around the earth at the equator, throw 2,000 miles of paper away, and still have enough left over to cover a trip from Chicago to Kabul and back. Or a stack of paper that would tower 5,000 feet above the summit of Mt. McKinley, North America's highest mountain, starting from sea level.

It takes about 35 mature trees to make a month's supply of paper for my school, which adds up to 315 trees every year. Loss of habitat to commercial logging is a major threat to the survival of the Bengal tiger.

In 2003, there were enough high school students in the United States to fill 30,937 schools the size of the one I teach at. Thirty-one thousand Washington Monuments. Thirty-one thousand Mt. McKinleys. Ten million trees per year.

And remember that trip from Chicago to Kabul? An Afghan citizen living in Kabul province makes an average of 60 dollars a month. With that money, if there were no need to buy food or pay rent or do pretty much anything else, each Afghan citizen could purchase 9,000 sheets of copy paper. That much paper cut into inch-wide strips would reach about 13 miles.

Wisconsin spent more than $8,300 on each student at my school in the 2005–06 school year, or $922 per month. Any student who spent that money on paper could buy 138,333 sheets of twenty-pound bond.

Cut into inch-wide strips, that's enough paper to stretch 204 miles per student.

In addition to teaching English at Chippewa Falls High School, **Tom Pamperin** is a district director of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English and a freelance writer. He uses far too much paper.

Dusk

Door of the day ajar.
Sky, a blue-gray watery wash.
I'm flat on my back on the trampoline—human X.
None of the trees in periphery have budded,
their thousand thin fingers like ancient
diagrams of the body, nervous systems
drawn skyward by the sun's blatant disdain
for gravity, each with its own ending.
I feel a sudden sadness that winter is done,
that the inner order of things must be hidden
by the leafy barrage, when a purple martin
sweeps the sky, pulls me to my feet.
I whoop and whistle, fly out like a yo-yo
tied to earth's string.

—Robert A. Ayres

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Robert A. Ayres's poems have appeared in *Laurel Review, Marlboro Review, Southwestern American Literature,* and *English Journal,* as well as in anthologies, including *Outsiders* and *Urban Nature* from Milkweed Editions. An avid birder, he lives in Austin, Texas.

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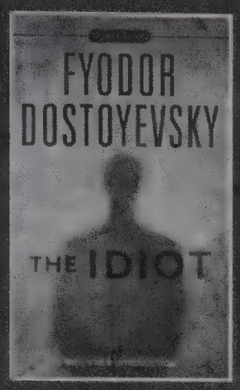

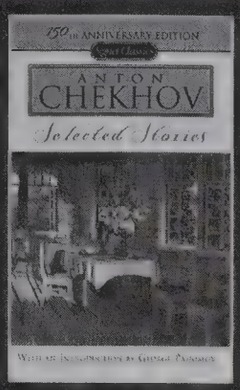

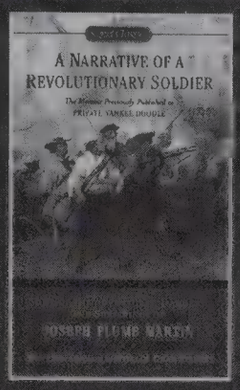

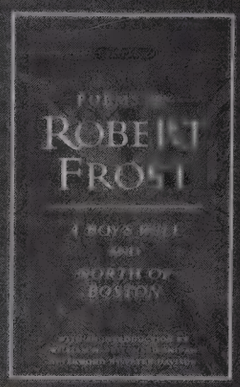

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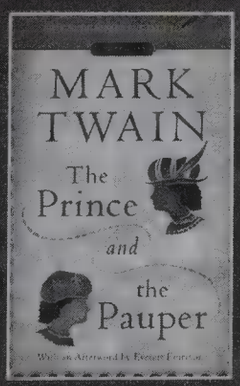

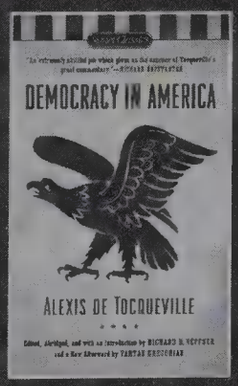

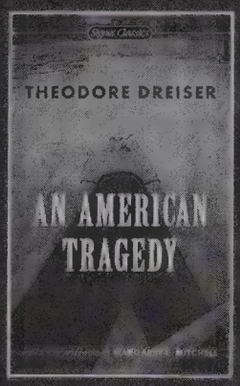

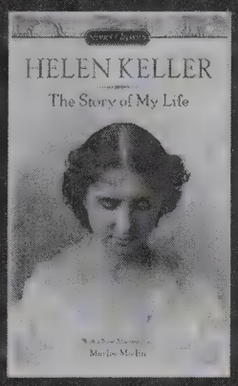

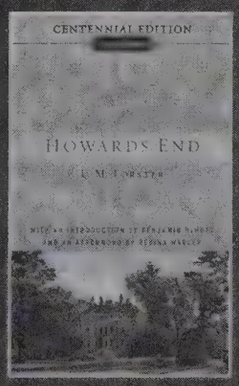

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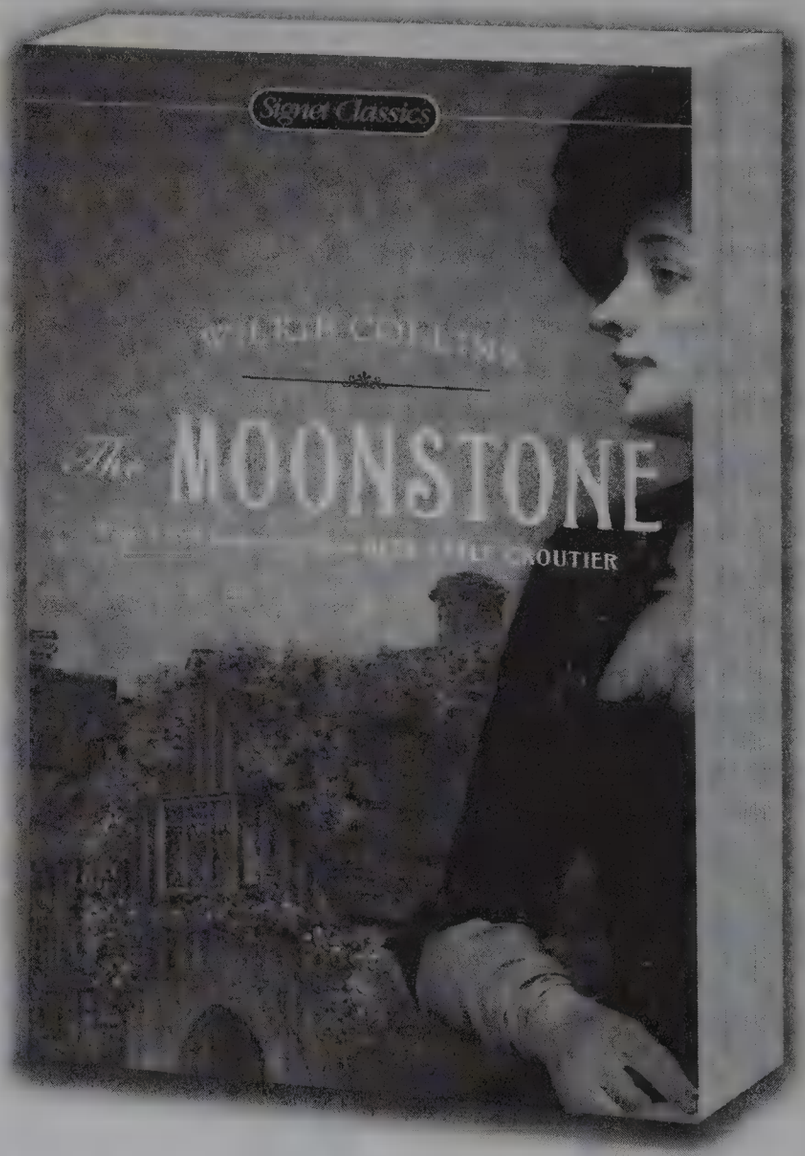

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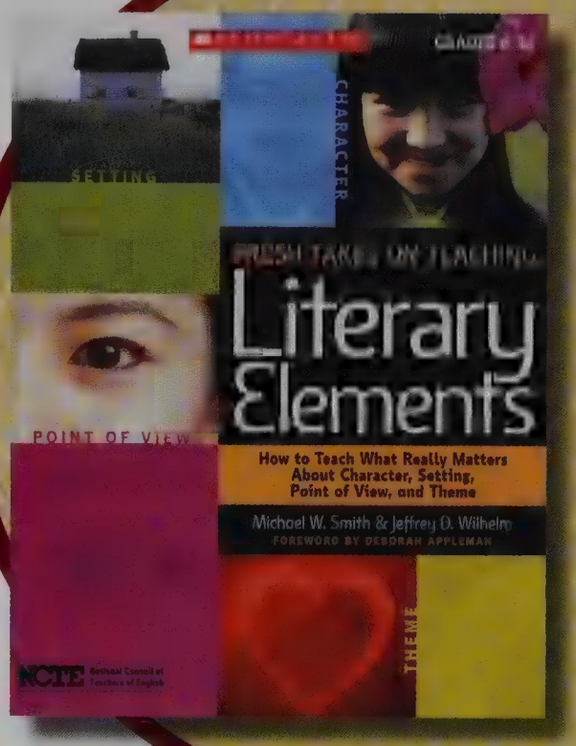

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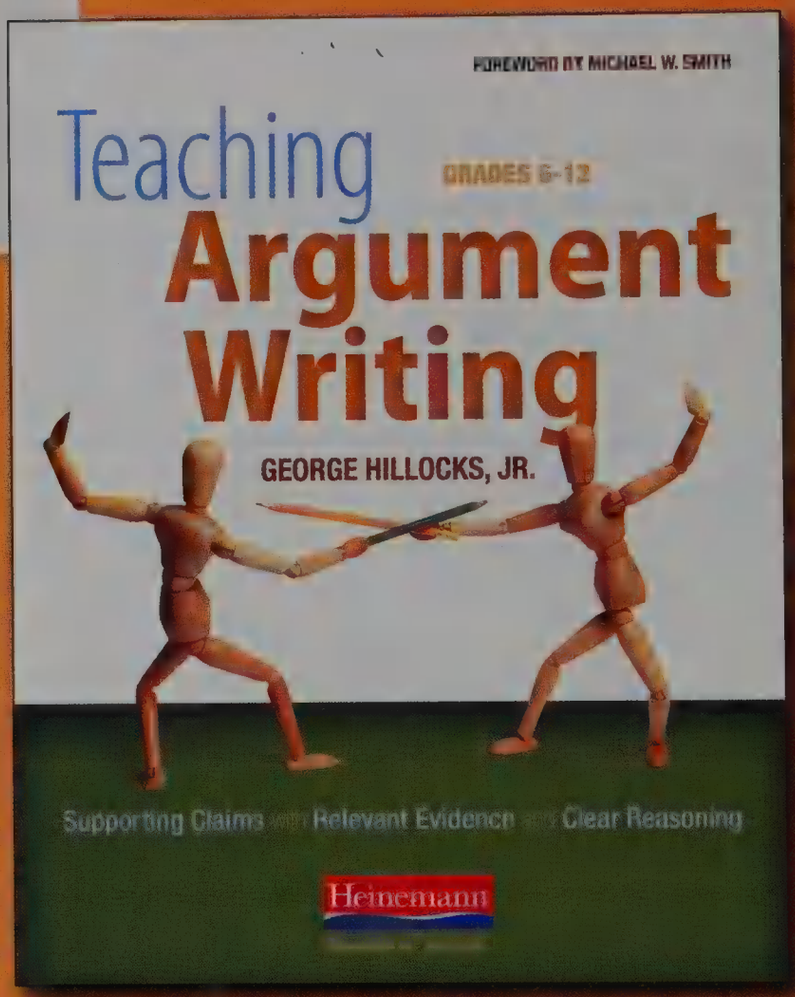

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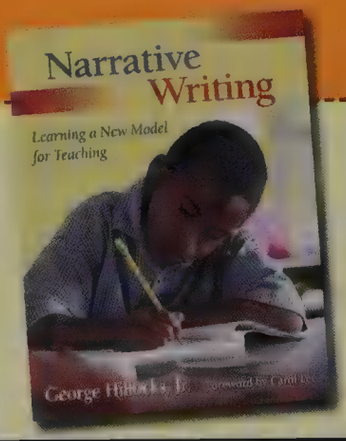

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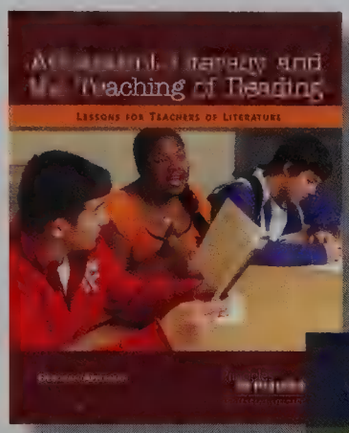

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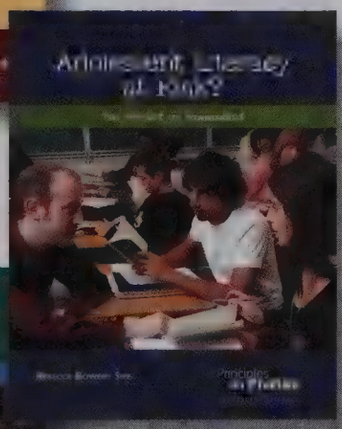

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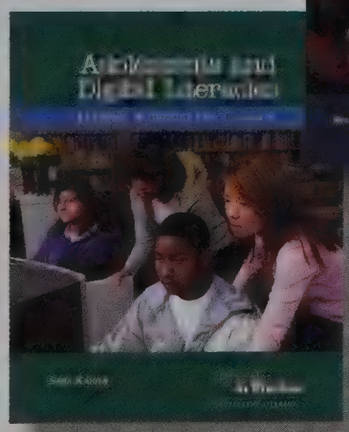

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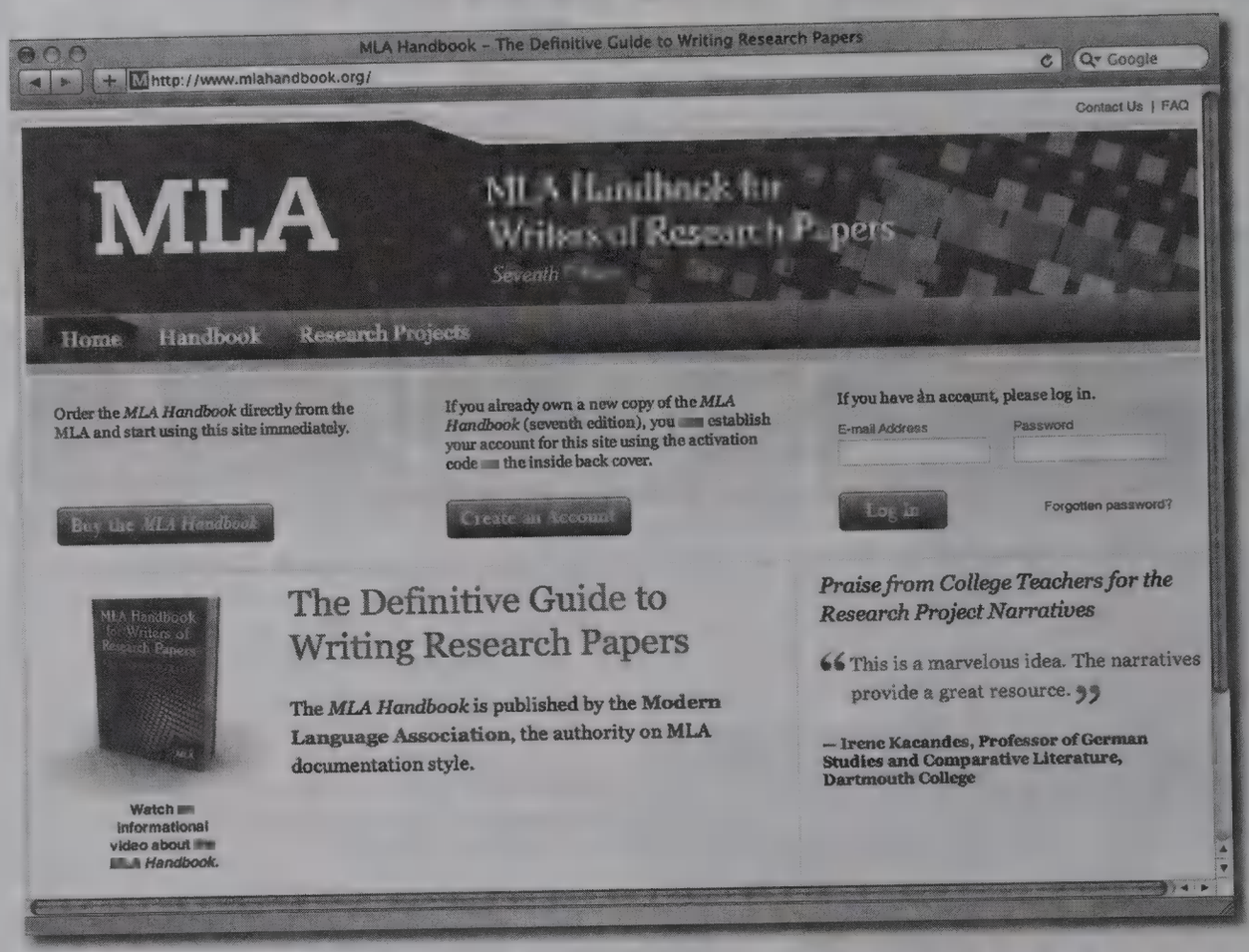

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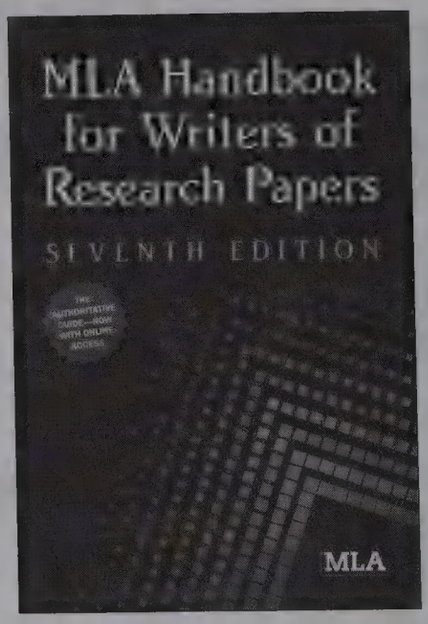

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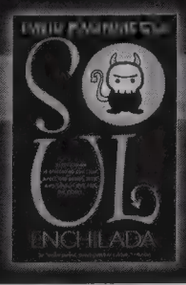

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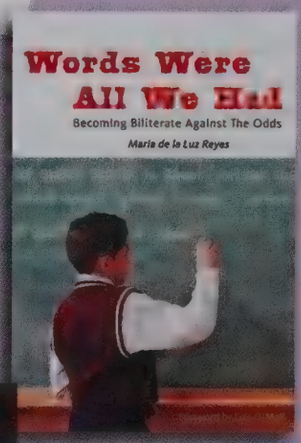

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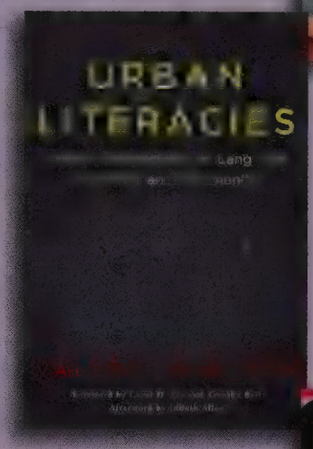

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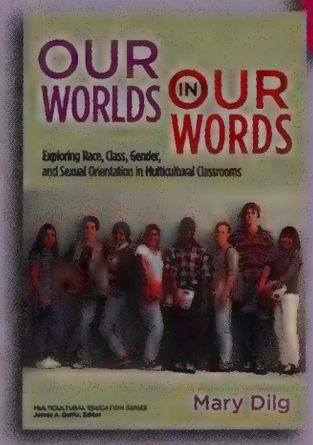

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Call for Manuscripts

Send manuscripts to

Ken Lindblom, Editor
English Journal
Stony Brook University
English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be sent by email as an attachment to English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with standard margins. Word 2000 or later is preferred. Authors using Macintosh software should save their work as Word for Windows. **Paper submissions should be sent only when email is impossible.** Please save copies of anything you send us. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 10 to 15 double-spaced, typed pages in length (approximately 2,500 to 3,750 words).
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the NCTE *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language.* (See address below.)
- Number all pages.
- Use in-text documentation, following the current edition of the *MLA Handbook.* Where applicable, a list of works cited and any other bibliographic information should also follow MLA style.
- List your name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and email address on the title page only, not on the manuscript. Receipt of manuscripts will be acknowledged by email, when possible, or by mail.

English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by two or more outside reviewers. We will attempt to reach a decision on each article within five months. The decision on pieces submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

Prospective contributors should obtain a copy of the *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language* from the NCTE website at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang.

Celebrating a Century of *English Journal*
Publication Date: January 2012

The first *English Journal* was published in January 1912. In the January 2012 issue, we'll offer critical perspectives on 100 years of English teaching theory and practice, retrospectives from former *EJ* editors, and more.

The Community in the Classroom
Deadline: July 15, 2011
Publication Date: March 2012

Classroom community is an essential ingredient in a healthy, productive English class. In a classroom with a strong sense of community, students will write with more energy; review the writing of their peers with more effort, honesty, and sensitivity; and spur each other on to better accomplishments and have more fun in the process. Students who feel a sense of duty to their classmates and feel respected by their peers and teachers will be more open about their thoughts and amenable to learning new ideas. In what innovative ways have you established and maintained classroom community? What works of literature or writing assignments have you used to help students better understand and engage in the class as members of a larger community?

The community outside the school is also an important part of an English class. The community raises the children we educate, pays for our schools, employs our graduates, and supports (or impedes) our teaching efforts. A positive connection between the English classroom and the outside community can greatly enhance students' (and teachers') experiences in many ways. And, instilling in students a sense of duty and service to the community can richly enhance those communities far into the future. How have you gotten local leaders and businesspeople involved in projects associated with your English class? How have you involved parents or other family members in helping students develop ELA skills and knowledge? In what ways have you encouraged students to engage in community service (local, national, global, in person or online) in ways that enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, or presenting skills?

For this issue of *English Journal,* we welcome articles that speak to the ways in which the concept of community can improve students' knowledge and abilities in English.

General Interest
May submit any time

We publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles foreground classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

Ongoing Features

Speaking My Mind: We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear with your photo in a future issue of *English Journal.* We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects.

Student Voices: This is a forum for students to share their experiences and recommendations in short pieces of 300 words. Teachers are encouraged to submit the best responses from their classes, not whole class sets, please. Individual students are welcome to submit as well.

- What new information have you learned about your community or a person in your community as a result of an English class assignment? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)

Teacher to Teacher: This is a forum for teachers to share ideas, materials, and activities in short pieces of 300 words.

- How have you used an English assignment to get students more involved in the community or members of the community more involved in your classroom? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)

Original Photography

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be sent as 8″ × 10″ black-and-white glossies or as an electronic file in a standard image format

at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer's name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

Original Cartoons

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. Line drawings in black ink should be submitted on $8^1/_2$" × 11" unlined paper and be signed by the artist.

Columns and Column Editors

Challenging Texts
Editor: P. L. Thomas

Franz Kafka proclaimed that a "book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." The authors and texts we bring into our classrooms and the acts of literacy that students perform about and because of those texts are essential aspects of creating classrooms where students become critical readers and critical writers. This column will explore the authors and texts we choose that confront the world and the worldviews of students. We also explore various theoretical approaches to literature that challenge and energize students and teachers.

Contributors should explore and share their classroom practices that address questions such as, What authors and texts confront the world and students' assumptions? What texts expand students' perceptions of and assumptions about genre? What texts confront both big ideas and the art and craft of writing? How does critical pedagogy look in literature classrooms? What literary theories do you find most generative?

Submit an electronic Word file attached to your email to the column editor, P. L. Thomas, at paul.thomas@furman.edu. Contributors are encouraged to query the column editor and share drafts of column ideas as part of the submission process.

Mentoring Matters
Editor: Thomas M. McCann

Some critics use the disturbing phrase "eating their young" to refer to the way some school leaders and veteran teachers treat new teachers. The image refers to the regrettable practice of allowing the newcomer to endure the least desirable conditions in a school or department. In contrast, caring veteran teachers will be sensitive to the need to foster growth and to promote a sense of self-efficacy in new colleagues. The development of any teacher is not complete after departure from a teacher preparation program. Professional growth continues for years, and supportive colleagues can play a significant role in influencing the development, satisfaction, and retention of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This column invites contributors to offer practicing teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs their insights about how to mentor and support early-career English teachers, including reports from early-career teachers about their positive mentoring experiences. We especially encourage specific suggestions for practices that will help veteran teachers to support newer colleagues in developing positive relationships with students, contending with pressures to conform to test-driven curricula, handling an enormous workload, and forming collaborative relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and parents.

We invite column contributions of 500–1,500 words addressing themes about mentoring and supporting early-career teachers. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Thomas M. McCann at tmccann1@niu.edu.

Off the Shelves
Editor: Mark Letcher

We are living in a new golden age of young adult literature. Edgy and engaging titles by authors both emerging and established have been pushing the field of young adult literature (YAL) to places we've never seen before. Teen readers are seeing more innovative formats and genre-blending in their reading, are exposed to authors from around the world, and are blurring the lines between previously established "teen" and "adult" fiction.

There may be no better time to celebrate and promote the diversity, characters, issues, and pure literary craftsmanship that YAL offers its audience, and our hope is that you will help us contribute to the conversation.

This column will explore a wide range of topics related to literature written for and/or read by young adults, with a strong emphasis on recently published works. We particularly welcome the voices and experiences of secondary teachers, for whom YAL provides vital classroom reading, suggestions for eager and reluctant students, and engaging personal reading material.

Submissions of 500–1,500 words, inquiries, and suggestions for future column topics should be directed to Mark Letcher at mark.letcher@purduecal.edu.

Poetry
Editor: Anne McCrary Sullivan

In her poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," Naomi Shihab Nye reminds us that "poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes, / they are sleeping." Look inside your shoes, your desk drawers and kitchen cabinets, the hallways of your school, the grocery stores and garbage dumps of your community. "Find" some poems and send them to *EJ*. Choose those that seem a fit, either explicitly or implicitly, with announced themes of upcoming *EJ* issues. We are looking for well-crafted original poems in any style, serious or humorous, written by teachers, students, or those who love them. We do not consider previously published poems or simultaneous submissions.

Send by email attachment, for blind review, up to five poems with only phone number and initials on the page. In your email message, include brief biographical information. Poets whose work is published will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Send submissions to EJPoetry@nl.edu. Send correspondence to Anne McCrary Sullivan at ASullivan@nl.edu.

Professional Writing in the English Classroom
Editors: Jonathan Bush and Leah A. Zuidema

Professional writing in the English classroom is rich with possibilities. Students can learn to attend carefully to audience, purpose, and situation through all genres of writing, but these rhetorical concerns are especially relevant in professional writing contexts. This column focuses on the teaching of professional writing—writing that solves day-to-day problems, accomplishes work, and enables changes in organizations and communities. Professional writing instruction involves much more than teaching memos, proposals, or résumés; it can also be a way to teach for engaged, ethical citizenship. It encompasses ideas consistent with best practices in our discipline—

allowing students to think creatively and critically within complex rhetorical situations. It values multiple genres, textual conventions, and visual design. Through professional writing, students can address real issues (big or small) and work to effect change by writing to authentic audiences.

Professional writing can be combined with other, more traditional studies of writing, literature, and language. This column helps readers who seek to teach professional writing concepts and to expand their teaching to include new projects and genres. We welcome contributions from those who teach professional writing as well as those who see echoes of professional writing concepts in their other work with writing, literature, and language. Please send inquiries, submissions of 500–1,500 words, or suggestions for future column topics to Jonathan Bush at jbush@wmich.edu or Leah Zuidema at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom
Editor: Julie Gorlewski

Research provides a lens through which teachers can better understand our pedagogical successes and failures. Research illuminates the social and political contexts of education, enhancing our appreciation of students, their families, and the communities we serve. The principles of research offer a foundation for reflective practice.

Classrooms are laboratories for teaching and learning. In this era of accountability, it is important for teachers to apply research to practice. We must be collaborators in the process of deciding what works, not merely consumers of products deemed "research-based." In the spirit of a critical theoretical approach, this column will seek both to clarify and to problematize research-based practices.

Submissions for this column might include an informal mini-study or a story about an attempt—successful or not—to conduct classroom research. Contributors should focus on a classroom application of professional scholarship by considering these questions: What worked (and didn't work) in my classroom? Why? How do I know? Also welcome are short reviews of recently published books that contributors believe can enhance teachers' classroom research practices. Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words.

Authors, especially new contributors, are encouraged to submit ideas for columns. Send inquiries or submissions to gorlewsj@newpaltz.edu.

Success with ELLs
Editor: Margo DelliCarpini

English educators face increasing linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In fact, enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in the nation's public schools between the years 1990 and 2000 grew by 105%, compared to a 12% overall growth rate among the general school population. ELLs enter our classrooms with a variety of prior school experiences, cultural expectations, and literacy experiences. Making the English language arts curriculum accessible to ELLs can pose unique challenges. However, when teachers implement strategies that target the needs of ELLs, all students can benefit.

This column will be a place where classroom teachers can find helpful ideas for teaching ELLs. Please submit manuscripts regarding challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream English classes and how you have developed innovative strategies to address their needs while enhancing the learning environment for all learners. Please share materials and practices that you have found to be especially effective for your ELLs, reports of successful collaborative instruction, motivational strategies that you use, and ways you connect content to ELLs' lives. Secondary-level English teachers are especially encouraged to submit their ideas. New authors who have ideas for columns that need development are encouraged to contact the editor. Send ideas or complete submissions of 500–1,500 words to Margo DelliCarpini at margo.dellicarpini@lehman.cuny.edu.

Teaching Young Adult Literature
Editor: Mike Roberts

As English teachers, we are constantly faced with the challenge of teaching literature that is both thought-provoking *and* entertaining. With today's YA literature better than ever, now is the time to help students discover the joy—and sometimes the pain—that comes with reading a great book. YA literature can provide students with a chance to engage in reading that is meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable. Plus, YA literature can inspire energized discussions about topics students feel passionate about.

This column will explore *teaching ideas and strategies* for some of today's newest and most popular young adult literature. This is not a column that reviews literature; it describes effective ways of *teaching* young adult literature. We encourage submissions of 1,800–2,500 words that focus on effective ways of incorporating YA literature into the curriculum. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Mike Roberts at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

Search for New Editor of *Research in the Teaching of English*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Research in the Teaching of English.* In May 2013, the term of the present editors, Mark Dressman, Sarah McCarthey, and Paul Prior, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received no later than **August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in August 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *Research in the Teaching of English* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

From the Editor

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Beyond Grammar: The Richness of English Language

Why "*Beyond* Grammar"? All language has grammar. *Grammar* is what we call the design of language that allows us to make sense of it. But this is not the *grammar* to which our theme refers. The *grammar* that our theme takes up is the traditional instruction of school grammar that, from what I've seen and read, remains the primary way (and frequently the only way) that English language—as a subject itself—is taken up in English classes. Public discussion of English teaching is so stuck on the idea of grammar rules that more important aspects of our field are rarely mentioned. This is true even though the research is clear that traditional grammar instruction—drill-and-kill attention to the parts of speech and punctuation rules—does not improve student writing at all, and there is even some evidence that focusing on grammar rules actually worsens students' writing (see Dunn and Lindblom; Schuster).

English language is a fascinatingly complex and sophisticated set of ways to communicate. There is so much for us to learn and teach about English that to focus so heavily on minute details of grammar is an intellectual tragedy. This issue of *English Journal,* "Beyond Grammar," offers alternatives to traditional grammar instruction so students and teachers can immerse themselves in the full richness of our language.

To make the most of the articles in this issue, and the other works on English language you encounter, there are a few concepts about language study that may help.

Concepts for Enriched Discussions of English Language

Consider the problem of The. Although we think of our language as "*The* English Language," the idea that there is one English language is a myth. There are, in fact, many, many specific versions of English language that function effectively and continuously all over the world; for example, working-class vernacular English, African American Vernacular English, legal English (used in courtrooms), Boston English, Southern English, combinations of English and other languages (e.g., "Spanglish"), and so on. Thinking of *The* English language as a singular entity is like thinking the word *student* means there is only one kind of student.

Consider using the phrase standardized English *instead of* Standard English. Using *Standard English* makes it seem as if the formal version of English that we teach in school is somehow better or more correct than any other version of English. It isn't. It's just that some institutions (primarily publishing houses) have taken it upon themselves to standard*ize* some aspects of English language, and many of us choose to cooperate with these institutions. Some versions of English have not been standardized, but that doesn't make them wrong; it makes them *unstandardized.* What we call them matters, because if we teach students that the language they grew up speaking is wrong, it's disrespectful, it may offend them, it can interfere with students' willingness to learn standardized English (which they must)—and it's incorrect. For those students who grew up speaking standardized English, teaching them that standardized English is

better or more correct might foster arrogance and intolerance.

Take an additive approach, not a deficit approach to language study. Students don't come to us broken. They don't need to be fixed. They come to us with vast experience as language practitioners—even young students—and they have accomplished a great deal by using language effectively, in many cases in more than one language. It is our job to help students continue to grow as users of language. We should add the ability to wield standardized English effectively as a tool to the language toolboxes students have already assembled. And, we should help them improve as communicators in all the versions of English that they use currently and that they may choose to use in the future. In other words, we should help students enable themselves to grow as writers, readers, and speakers even after they leave our classrooms. Doing so requires a "both/and" attitude. We shouldn't exclude any version of English from our classes (or try to remove it from students' toolboxes); rather, we should embrace many versions of English and help students to develop them all—even if we give standardized English the most focus, as we probably should.

Take a contrastivist approach, not a correctionist approach to student writing and speaking. Instead of using examples of supposedly "correct" and "incorrect" English sentences, help students understand the varieties of English that operate in the world and which versions are effective in what rhetorical situations. *Contrastivist* approaches to teaching language—which have developed from studies of *code-switching* pedagogy—can be powerful ways to get students to study language and understand the effects of its use.

Give students options, not rules. Students who want to accomplish something in their writing need to know what options are available to them. They don't want lists of rules to follow. They want ways to achieve their ends. Help students understand how they can write and organize their ideas in different sentences, paragraphs, and genres. Writing style doesn't come after students learn "the rules." Rules come from what stylistic options writers care to make use of in a particular rhetorical situation. Teachers who engage students in real rhetorical situations that the students care about find that the students become very interested in writing well.

The Richness of English Language

The cover of this issue, by Arizona artist Michael Schieffer, is a visualization of a statement by a well-known writer about careful attention to English language. If you look carefully at the top left corner, you'll see the author of this saying, as his famous words are brought to life in the remainder of the piece. No lightning bugs were hurt in the making of this cover.

The right words create images, connote tone, and indicate register. Words form poetic phrases and harsh commands. They weave meaningful conversations, express deep emotions, explain difficult propositions. Words can be funny or clinical, clear or ambiguous. They can be rude or polite, targeted to a specific audience or designed for broad understanding. English can be obvious and sincere or subtle and ironic. Variations in English usage and different English grammars have fascinated linguists and bedeviled language purists for centuries.

This issue of *English Journal* is devoted to the ways in which we may help students understand, appreciate, and use English language in all its complicated glory.

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A former secondary English teacher, **Ken Lindblom** is associate professor of English and director of English teacher education at Stony Brook University (SUNY). He has been editor of *English Journal* since 2008. He and his frequent co-author, Patricia A. Dunn, have written *Grammar Rants: How a Backstage Tour of Writing Complaints Can Help Students Make Informed, Savvy Choices about Their Writing,* a book forthcoming from Boynton/Cook.

Inspiring an Aesthetic Appreciation of Language

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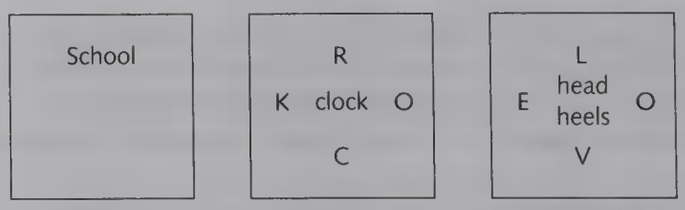
I've always had an appreciation of language—its rhythms, sounds, wordplay, dialects, usage variations, and powers to manipulate. In fact, unlike most English teachers who gravitated to the profession through their love of literature, I was attracted to the opportunities of sharing my love for language. Reflecting on how I came to this appreciation, I remember my father reciting poems to me when I was a little girl, particularly Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha" ("By the shores of Gitche Gumee / By the shining Big-Sea-Water"). I was enthralled by the rhythm, the rhyme, and the sounds of the words—both familiar and unfamiliar. In contrast, my mother was more concerned about my speaking correct grammar, always correcting my every error, allowing no room for what we now know as a natural development of language. Thanks to my mother, however, all throughout school grammar was easy for me. I was intrigued by the rules as well as when and why they were broken. And thanks to my father, I was also intrigued by wordplay and took pride when I could use my wit to instill laughter—or groans—through punning jokes and riddles. Language became for me a fascinating mystery, a venue of entertainment, and a highly respected tool.

In my early years of teaching, I dutifully brought out the Warriner's, thinking it my main responsibility to drill students using the language correctly just as my teachers and mother had done for me, but it didn't take long for me to realize two things: first, my appreciation for grammar was not rubbing off on my students; and, second, drilling on grammar was driving my students into a dislike of English class altogether. Worse, because I was not alone in my methods, many of my students were entering my Freshman English classes with the misconception that English class was synonymous with grammar instruction, and they dreaded it! As a result, besides teaching the curriculum, including grammar, I made it a goal to expose students to other areas of English language that were interesting, useful, and even fun.

My overall theme for several years was "Language Is Alive!" and I dedicated a wall-sized bulletin board to it, encouraging students to bring in samples of language uses and devices we were addressing in class. We started the school year examining and playing with creative aspects of the language from hink pinks and hinketty pinketties (e.g., "What do you call a heavy mattress? A lead bed." or "What is Santa's advice? Remember December."), concrete language frames (see fig. 1), and Tom Swifties (e.g., "'I wasn't there,' Tom said absently" and "'I missed the target,' Tom said aimlessly"). We then moved on to more serious concepts, such as figurative language and effective, specific word choice. In our journals and on our walls, we created lists of vivid words and made it a

FIGURE 1. Concrete Language Frames



High School | Rock around the Clock | Head over heels in love

game to see who could best revise dull sentences to those so specific we couldn't help picturing them; e.g., "The guy moved into the room" became "The shifty-eyed, balding senior staccato-stepped through the half-closed, arched doorway." We read Dylan Thomas's "My Love Affair with Words" with each student creating a top-ten list of most beautiful or coolest-sounding words, and we posted them on the bulletin board. Throughout the school year, we continued to note clever usages of language and cool-sounding words to lace these early lessons into everything we read.

When we read *To Kill a Mockingbird,* we studied the dialects, not only looking at those of the Southern whites and African Americans but also making comparisons to our Midwestern dialects and to those in the Northern United States. We looked at the history of dialect immigration in the United States, reading from J. N. Hook's *The Story of American English.* Usually we had enough students who had moved here from a variety of areas of the country to make these lessons real while students who had lived here all their lives were shocked to learn that, for example, not everyone pronounced *towel* with one syllable. As a part of the dialect study, we also looked at how the characters from various social levels, from Atticus to Bob Ewell, spoke in formal versus informal manners and why, like Calpurnia, we often need a "command of two languages" (Lee 180). In turn, these aha moments provided a solid foundation for our ensuing grammar and usage study during the year. We even administered surveys on dialect and grammar to family and friends of all ages to get their opinion on what language choices mattered—and what didn't—in the workplace and throughout the community.

While reading *Romeo and Juliet,* we took a new look at creative language devices as we studied Shakespearean puns and insults as well as more advanced language devices, such as anastrophes and oxymorons. Students could infer the tones of these varying devices ranging from hilarious to serious, as well as substitute expressions and syntax that we might use today. We broke into groups to study the history of our language, with many students surprised that Shakespeare's English was not Old English or even Middle English, but actually Early Modern English. To exemplify the point further, we listened to readings of Old and Middle English poetry and compared readings of the Lord's Prayer throughout the centuries. Finally, we returned to our dialect study to look at the comparisons between American and British English, providing further emphasis with readings from Shaw's *Pygmalion.* In all cases, we played with the language we discovered by rewriting it into more modern-day language styles (formal and informal) and reciting it.

We ended the year by reading George Orwell's *1984,* with The Power of Language being one of its major themes. Frontloading the reading with activities on connotation versus denotation and on euphemisms and doublespeak, we watched for the language manipulation Big Brother and O'Brien used to keep Winston and others in the society under control, including analyzing the slogans "War Is Peace," "Freedom Is Slavery," and "Ignorance Is Strength." Similarly, we made connections to the language of advertisers and politicians—and even to our teachers and parents—to improve our roles as conscientious consumers of personal and societal persuasion. At the same time, we discussed how we could best use language responsibly yet to our own advantage, and we practiced our skills by incorporating these components into persuasive writings and speeches, revising to create variations based on our audiences and purposes.

Over the past couple years through social networking, I have been fortunate to become reacquainted with many of my former students—many now well over 40 years old—and I've been amazed by the number who remember and comment on the "Language Is Alive" theme from my classes. Although several of those students have contacted me about grammar questions, they have more eagerly shared a corny pun or an outrageous example of doublespeak they've encountered. These communications always make me smile as I'm confident that many of these students inherited my aesthetic appreciation of the various roles of language. Granted, at times these word studies were just plain fun, but, more than that, they proved interesting, filled with new information about our language heritage; most importantly, these studies beyond the world of grammar—whether emphasized on high-stakes assessments or not—promoted critical and creative thinking that are applicable to the everyday lives in which we live. I still consider these components of language to be our responsibility to teach.

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A classroom teacher for 27 years, **Kay Parks Haas** is currently an instructional projects specialist for the Olathe District Schools in Kansas. She is former president of ALAN and is chair of the Secondary Section and member of the NCTE executive committee. She has written several articles and columns in *English Journal* and *The ALAN Review* and has co-authored *Teaching English Creatively* and *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom* with John H. Bushman.

How Long Does My Poem Have to Be?

As long as a jump rope
an alligator
a garden hose

as long as a fire drill
morning announcements
the bus ride home on a Friday afternoon

as long as the Trail of Tears
an algebraic equation
a school year

as long as the Magna Carta
The Song of Hiawatha
the Pledge of Allegiance

as long as the shortest distance between two points
a doctor's note
a cafeteria line

as long as the fight for emancipation
the Cold War
40 days and 40 nights

as long as she doesn't mind
as long as you both agree
as long as there's enough for everyone

as long as you do your homework first
as long as your father says it's okay
as long as you're living under my roof

as long as you're asking . . .

—Arlyn Miller

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Arlyn Miller teaches poetry and creative writing in schools and in the community in the suburbs of Chicago. Her work with kids and teens and their teachers is described on her website, www.poeticlicensinc.net. Her students' work has been published through the Pioneer Press, in The Muses' Gallery, and on the website for the Illinois Poet Laureate. Arlyn is also a poet, journalist, and essayist. Her writing has appeared widely in magazines and in literary journals. E-mail her at arlyn2@comcast.net.

Masterpiece at 40: A Celebration

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In 1971, the year that *Masterpiece Theatre* premiered on WGBH, the public television station in Boston, my family lived in London for the summer. In an age in which air travel was as glamorous as it was uncommon, and going abroad was something I thought people only did in the movies, three months in London was the adventure of a lifetime for an American girl. Raised on *Paddington Bear* and *The Secret Garden,* I was astonished to find myself walking through the settings of some of my favorite stories and began to learn about England's history, which read like a storybook, too: all those kings and queens whose names I memorized out of a big, fat, illustrated volume that I kept in my small attic bedroom. My life that summer had the taste and texture of an English novel, and I loved every minute of it, which might explain not only my choice to become an English teacher but also my lifelong addiction to *Masterpiece Theatre.*

Chat with any longtime fan of *Masterpiece*—an unofficial but tightly bonded club that includes every English teacher I have ever known—and you can draw out a connection to *Masterpiece,* past and present. One teacher wrote on the *Masterpiece* Facebook page, "A group of teachers at school closely follow . . . the series and spend our lunch time discussing and adding to our reading lists!"

Looking back, many of us can map our personal and national history through our favorite *Masterpiece* programs. In the turbulent early '70s, we spent Sunday nights engrossed in the well-ordered world of *Upstairs, Downstairs,* only to find that our deep attachment to the inhabitants of Eaton Place pushed us to reflect on the role of class, power, and privilege in our not-so-equal country. The late '70s brought us a national "crisis in confidence" and *I, Claudius,* an unforgettable, uncensored portrait of a decadent, decaying empire that made for some uneasy viewing in American living rooms. As the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, we traced the decline of another empire in *The Jewel in the Crown.* Then just as the Berlin Wall came down, *A Perfect Spy* aired, arriving like a coda to mark the end of the cold war.

Fast-forward to find new viewers marking points on their own timelines with *Masterpiece*: A 20-something friend reports that for her, 2008 was not only the year in which she first voted for president, but the Year She Discovered Jane, thanks to *The Complete Jane Austen* on *Masterpiece Classic.* My college-age son, after spending the summer of 2010 reading Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy, developed a sudden interest in all things Swedish, including Kenneth Branagh's *Wallander* series on *Masterpiece Mystery!* Recent ratings show that a growing audience of younger viewers is tuning in, even as their choices for viewing and entertainment proliferate. New generations—who can now watch *Masterpiece* on demand and online—will write their own chapters in the *Masterpiece* story.

Masterpiece began as a vehicle for airing high-quality British serial dramas, with the goal of providing viewers a cultural oasis in a broadcast television landscape that FCC chairman Newton Minow famously labeled "a vast wasteland." Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2011, *Masterpiece* still sets a standard for quality television (it has won an unprecedented 50 Emmy awards), yet it has maintained its vitality and its relevance for new audiences by broadening the range of its programming, redefining "the canon" just as we have in our

classrooms. By the program's second decade, its producers had taken to heart a lesson I learned from my tenth-grade English teacher: a work doesn't have to be British, or old, to be a classic. *Masterpiece* aired its first Australian production, *A Town Like Alice,* in 1980, and in the past 20 years it has presented more contemporary works and daring, updated adaptations. In 2001, *Masterpiece* launched "The American Collection," producing works by 20th-century American writers as varied as James Agee, Esmeralda Santiago, and Langston Hughes. In 2008, *Masterpiece* reinvigorated its brand by creating three seasons: Classic, Mystery!, and Contemporary, bringing exciting new works to the small screen. The 40th-anniversary-year lineup includes *Downton Abbey,* a splendid new family saga set in a gorgeous English country home just before World War I (and destined to become an instant *Masterpiece* favorite), and in April 2011, a brand-new installment of perhaps the most famous of all *Masterpiece* series, *Upstairs, Downstairs.* In July 2011, on *Masterpiece Mystery!,* Italian detective Aurelio Zen makes his first appearance, in a series based on the popular mysteries by Michael Dibden. Today's *Masterpiece* is successful in a television landscape that is no longer a wasteland but abundant in quality drama, thanks, in part, to 40 years and 2,000 Sunday nights of *Masterpiece.*

Masterpiece in the Classroom

So, we teachers love *Masterpiece,* but does it belong in our classrooms at a moment when we face so many demands on our instructional time? I would argue that the case has never been easier to make. From long experience, teachers know that the book-on-film has perhaps a unique power to draw both enthusiastic and reluctant readers into discussion, analysis, and enjoyment of a work of literature. The student who loved the book is eager to see how familiar characters and imagined settings have been adapted to the screen and will be an active viewer with a critical eye, while the less enthusiastic reader, familiar and comfortable with the medium of film, will discover that the language, characters, themes, and other elements from the pages of literature become more accessible on screen. As a high school student explained, "My English teacher showed us the films that were based on the novels we read in class, and they really helped me understand and enjoy the novels even more."

As students toggle between these forms of media, working as active interpreters and critics, the study of both is enriched. When we take a "multiple ways of knowing" approach, opening up a dialogue between the printed page and the screen, we create opportunities to engage students on many levels and for a variety of instructional purposes, from conventional language arts study (e.g., critical reading and thinking, written and oral communication, the elements of drama and fiction) to what we now call essential 21st-century skills. No longer peripheral, these are now central to our teaching: media and visual literacy, using and creating with technology, and understanding and practicing collaboration. Film study in the language arts classroom is hardly new, but it is a newly relevant and powerful teaching tool.

Teaching Resources

Incorporating media into the language arts classroom is rich terrain, but it is a landscape that can be difficult to navigate, particularly for those of us whose initial training did not anticipate how important media would become. *Masterpiece* has always considered teachers to be an important audience. As Rebecca Eaton, executive producer for *Masterpiece,* commented, "From the beginning, teachers have been enthusiastic viewers. . . . We know that many of you use *Masterpiece* as a way to introduce students to complex stories and to enhance their understanding of literature" (*Film*). For over 20 years, *Masterpiece* has created print and online resources—written by teachers for teachers, with input from teacher advisory boards—to help middle school and high school educators use *Masterpiece* to enrich their teaching.

There are more than 30 teacher's guides on the *Masterpiece* website (http://www.pbs.org/masterpiece/learn). Practical and comprehensive, the guides provide insightful before- and after-viewing questions, as well as innovative activities designed to help students discover themes, find points of connection, identify and understand literary elements, and understand the art of adaptation. As one teacher said, "*Masterpiece* . . . works are often the first time students have seen literature interpreted visually. It

MASTERPIECE TEACHER'S GUIDES: A SAMPLING

From *Teaching Dickens: A Masterpiece Guide*

According to Norrie Epstein in *The Friendly Dickens,* walking through the streets of London was part of Dickens's creative process: "Before he could begin a novel he would take to the city's streets and walk as fast as he could for hours." These long walks and the writing that resulted from them helped establish Dickens's reputation as a *flaneur,* a "connoisseur of street life." Take to the streets of your own town or neighborhood with a notebook and/or camera in hand and become a connoisseur of the street life you observe. Capture the details you notice—the characters you encounter, the businesses and buildings you see, and the social conditions around you. Share your street-life observations with fellow classmates by presenting a narrated multimedia slide show or video through Flickr (www.flickr.com) or through Voicethread (www.voicethread.com).

WGBH Educational Foundation. *Teaching Dickens: A Masterpiece Guide,* 2009. Excerpt used with permission. http://www.pbs.org/masterpiece/dickens/dickens_teachersguide.pdf

From *The Complete Guide to Teaching Jane Austen*

Name and list each of the characters in the film you viewed that are satirized in some way. (Some of Austen's most satirical characters are Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice,* John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey,* Mr. Elliot in *Persuasion,* and Mrs. Elton in *Emma.*) Write the names on index cards and distribute them to volunteers who leave the room and reenter "in character," using gesture, costume, or monologue as clues to the character's identity. Students will guess who the character is. How did students make the identification? How much does Austen exaggerate her characters' traits and behaviors? What attitude, behavior, or value is she taking aim at through her satire?

WGBH Educational Foundation. *The Complete Guide to Teaching Jane Austen,* 2010. Excerpt used with permission. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/austen/austen_teachersguide.pdf

From *The Diary of Anne Frank: Teacher's Guide*

During World War II many governments and media sources tried to tell the world about the systematic genocide of the Jews, but the killing continued. Can one person's words make a difference? What if Anne Frank could have anonymously posted daily entries to a blog instead of to a diary? How might this public and immediate dissemination of her thoughts and experiences have influenced the way ordinary people thought about the Nazis' treatment of Jews? In your opinion, would it have made a difference? What do we gain and lose by shifting from private diaries to public blogs?

WGBH Educational Foundation. *The Diary of Anne Frank Teacher's Guide,* 2010. Excerpt used with permission. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/annefrank/annefrank_teachersguide.pdf

From *Film in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers*

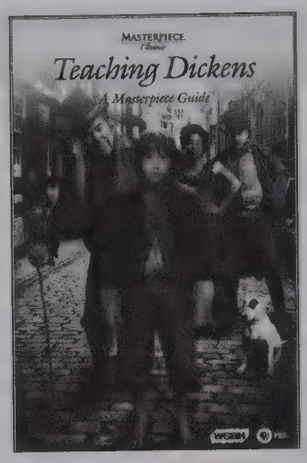
Open to a page from any classic novel. How much of the text is dialogue? How much is narration? If you were to cut the narration from the page, what would be lost? What does the narration show you about character, setting, and action that dialogue alone cannot? How would you replace it if you were filming this scene? You can also reverse this process by taking a scene from a film and rewriting it as narrative description. What is lost? What is gained?

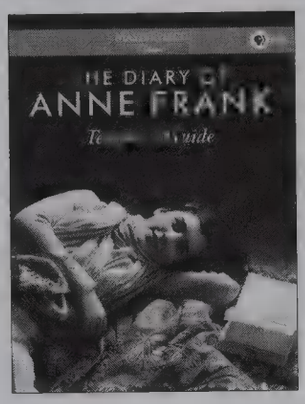
WGBH Educational Foundation. *Film in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers,* 2004. Excerpt used with permission. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/fic.html

MASTERPIECE™ 40 YEARS

gives them a deeper appreciation of the work, helps them understand how a film is a collaborative effort, helps them to interpret more deeply, and makes them think about other points of view." By "reading" both forms of media side by side, students come away with a better understanding of the choices an author, screenwriter, or team of filmmakers must make to communicate successfully with an audience. Many of the activities ask students to apply or share what they have learned by creating written, visual, or other media pieces of their own in response to or as an extension of their study of the book, the film, and the adaptation process. In addition, the guides offer background material, such as author biographies, essays about the historical context or literary genre, and extensive literature and

Web resources. (Sample questions and activities from recent guides appear in the sidebar.)





Although the majority of the guides are dedicated to a single title (*Our Town, The Hound of the Baskervilles, Henry V*), some cover several titles by an author (*Teaching Dickens, The Complete Jane Austen*). For *Endgame,* which aired on *Masterpiece Contemporary* and was based on Robert Harvey's *The End of Apartheid,* the guide offers "Curriculum Connections" for a wide range of subjects and topics. A special guide from WGBH Educational Foundation, *Film in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers* (2004), which utilizes nearly 20 titles from *Masterpiece*'s film library, introduces teachers and students to the language of film and offers questions, activities, and graphic organizers to support student exploration of film technique, the art of adaptation, and literary elements in film. As always, the guide draws on real-life experience, including tips from teachers, such as the following:

- Begin class the day after viewing a film by having students write about or discuss which images or scenes stayed with them most strongly. Help students constantly ask themselves, "How did I feel during that scene, and how did the filmmaker make me feel that way?"
- Use film as a minilesson to highlight a skill or literary element you want your students to practice. For example, let them make predictions from the opening scenes of a film, then ask them to practice predicting while reading.

Aimed primarily at libraries and book clubs, the 30 *Masterpiece Book and Film Club* guides (http://www.pbs.org/masterpiece/bookclub) also offer teachers a wealth of discussion questions and activities that can be adapted for classroom use or school-based book clubs. Materials designed for the general public for each program and available on the *Masterpiece* website are also resources for teachers. Streaming video, plot synopses, biographies; interviews with actors, directors, and screenwriters; and behind-the-scenes information and other features can easily be incorporated into lessons.

Entering its fifth decade, *Masterpiece* is embracing new ways to reach out to and engage viewers. The 2010 broadcast of *The Diary of Anne Frank* showcased a variety of user technologies and outreach efforts to deepen the viewing experience of both teachers and students. The teacher's guide was written in partnership with Facing History and Ourselves, experts in Holocaust curricula. Before the broadcast, *Masterpiece* sponsored a live webinar for teachers, in which participants got a sneak peek at the film and discussed approaches to teaching the book and the film. In an event organized with the Great Books Foundation in Chicago, teachers from public, parochial, and Jewish day schools across the city were invited to a screening and panel discussion with Northwestern University professor Phyllis Lassner and *Masterpiece* executive producer Rebecca Eaton. Hundreds of free books and DVDs were distributed to help teachers in greater Chicago prepare students to view the broadcast at home. During the broadcast, over 60,000 viewers, many of them teachers, participated in a Twitter event hosted by *Masterpiece,* sharing their reactions to the film in real time and tweeting questions to two expert moderators who were on hand to provide background information and analysis. Finally, the WGBH Lab invited the next generation of media makers to tell their own stories about tolerance, beliefs, and self-expression in the spirit of Anne Frank's diary through its *Masterpiece* Video Diary Project. The inspiring results of this call to action can be viewed at http://www.thewgbhlab.org/open-call/masterpiece/masterpiece-video-diary.

Looking ahead, new technology is likely to make it easier to seamlessly incorporate *Masterpiece* and other visual media into the classroom and open up yet more ways for teachers, students, writers, and filmmakers to connect with each other and share their work. Even as *Masterpiece* is committed to keeping pace with change, it never seems to lose

sight of a central truth: when teachers bring *Masterpiece* into the classroom, they give their students the memorable experience they had themselves, whether five, ten, or even 40 years ago, when they first fell in love with *Masterpiece*—the knowing, the insight, and the pleasure that comes from seeing great literature made into great drama.

Happy 40th birthday, *Masterpiece*!

Work Cited

WGBH Educational Foundation. *Film in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers*, 2004. Web 3 Nov. 2010. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/fic.html. (A revised *Film in the Classroom* guide will be available March 2011.)

Carol Jackson Cashion has taught middle school and high school English and humanities in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Now a freelance writer and consultant, she has authored or co-authored several *Masterpiece* teachers' guides over the past ten years, including *A Teacher's Guide for* Anna Karenina, *A Teacher's Guide for* Oliver Twist, *A Teacher's Guide for* The Merchant of Venice *and* Othello, and *The Complete Guide to Teaching Jane Austen.*

Personal Narratives for Freshman English

It's simple.

Just write about you. In your own words,
from your own history, pull together a story
latched tightly at the ends. Be sure to include
anecdotes that will make 'em weep, and perhaps
Hollywood will come calling to save us all.

It's easy.

In this story of 1,000 words, use some
vernacular if you can. Make it authentic—
I want to see your mouth opened wide. Let me
inspect your molars, placing the reedy depressor on your
tongue (say "Aaaah"). Only then will I know your real age.

It's okay.

Because what I am hiding behind this Bachelor of Arts,
in barefeet and Patois or Creole or bastard English—
Talkin' like them white folk on the news—is your cousin.
What they never told you (hated for your free lunch), is
ain't no right or wrong history, you can say it here: in
passive voice even, in verbs that don't agree.
The most powerful sentence is declarative:

I am. You are. God is. We be.

—Christeene Fraser

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Christeene Fraser is a former English teacher, graduate student, and writer. Her first chapbook, *Little Earthquakes,* was the winner of the 2010 New York Book Festival poetry prize, and she was a finalist for the poetry award at the 2010 Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference. Her poems and articles have been featured in *The Purchase Independent,* and she has publications forthcoming in *RATTLE.* She currently works at Emory University at the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. Email her at crfrase@emory.edu.

Shifting Perspectives about Grammar: Changing What and How We Teach

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What is it about teaching language that makes it so problematic? Is it because language is connected to who and what we are and everything we do? That has to be part of it. I know that I've been through my share of discussions about language and how to teach it, with those involved holding a variety of perspectives. I've watched those discussions shift over the years of my teaching as something new comes up and perspectives shift again. Today, when I read articles or hear discussions about teaching grammar, I find interesting dichotomies in perspectives. Some people see language issues as right or wrong: That's it. No flexibility. This perspective is evident when people look at issues of language in stark contrasts instead of in relation to context. Even if teachers don't think of grammar that way, the use of worksheets or testing often suggests the right/wrong dichotomy. After all, we "correct" the worksheets; students ask us for "the right answer." Even the idea of people's usage being "corrected" by English teachers suggests this perspective: right or wrong.

Another dichotomy is evident when I hear teachers speak of grammar as opposed to content. This is apparent when teachers say they have to decide between helping students write about something interesting and substantive *or* helping them learn punctuation and usage. This dichotomy suggests a separation between what we say and how we say it; perhaps it even represents the conflict between the writing process movement and traditional instruction. Although most of what I read and hear in these discussions comes from teachers and parents, students hold some of those same perspectives about language. Right/Wrong. Either/Or. One way or another.

Shifting these perspectives is one of the first challenges to seeing language instruction from a more effective position. Shifting perspectives has been the story of my teaching life.

Past Tense

When I first started teaching, my district required traditional grammar instruction: parts of speech, diagramming, etc. I was comfortable with that perspective because that was the idea of grammar I had been taught: grammar as terminology unrelated to writing; grammar as right and wrong. Because it had been a few years since I'd pored over Warriner's as a student, I depended in those early years of my teaching on the textbook I had been given to help me deliver the expected instruction. I studied the appropriate chapter and then reviewed it with my students before assigning them the questions at the end of the section. Even though sometimes the ten questions at the end of the chapter had a ringer among them that required knowledge above what the chapter had addressed (infinitives among the prepositional phrases, for example), we carried on. When our school got a computer lab, I figured out how to use the lab to make grammar instruction more interesting. I loaded ten sentences from our textbook onto a document students could open in the lab. Then they would highlight or change the font in some way to identify parts of speech: italicize the nouns, underline the verbs, make adjectives Garamond bold, and so on. We were still doing the same old stuff—but now we were using technology!

My practice was the classic example of right and wrong: language as answers in the textbook,

totally removed from what my students wrote and spoke. We were doing the work of grammar study. Students didn't use what they learned in these lessons, at least overtly, in either their writing or their speech. But I didn't worry. I don't think they did, either. I don't think any of us assumed that was the point. The point was to *know grammar.* The answer sheets and quizzes would show that, right?

Eventually, the district changed its policy. Was it—finally—in response to the influential Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer report that had found that teaching grammar did not improve writing? I don't know. After all, it was more than 20 years after the report. This shift moved the purpose of language instruction away from just being able to get good scores on the quizzes or being able to identify parts of speech on district tests. Grammar was about writing now. When the policy changed, I happily left behind the textbook and the parts of speech and diagramming and worksheets. I knew the research current at the time said to teach grammar in context (Weaver). I didn't know exactly what that meant or what it looked like in a classroom, but I figured it meant not from textbooks. So I had my students practice compound sentences by writing about what they would take with them if they were going to be stranded on a desert island or practice using adverbs by writing a fake police report about a robbery at the Twinkie factory. It was different from a textbook; after all, my students were doing their own writing. But in some ways it was not so different. Do writers really think that way: Let's make sure I put plenty of adverbs in this explanation? Or that I use all compound sentences in this paragraph? I was mixing grammar instruction with students' writing, true, but it seemed pretty far removed from the writing they might do naturally. I was trying to change my perspective, but I was finding it a journey without a lot of maps.

In my search for direction, I went back (a long way) to the idea of imitation as a way to study grammar (Corbett and Connors). In my case, my students and I imitated sentences from published pieces of writing so that we internalized the patterns of more experienced writers. My students liked this practice: they could use their own ideas but set them in the patterns of other writers. My students wrote about sports or current school events or whatever they wanted in the patterns of sentences I brought to class.

- To the person who expects every desert to be barren sand dunes, the Sonoran must come as a surprise. (Spinelli 87)
- To students who have never worked with sentence imitation, the practice must seem somewhat like a puzzle.

Students enjoyed the practice—what seemed more like play than study—and seemed to apply at least some of what they were learning to their own writing. Although I sometimes referred to the grammatical terms of the constructions we were imitating, that wasn't the point of it. We weren't practicing sentences to identify infinitive phrases as a possible way to vary sentence beginnings. We were just playing with language, without naming parts, so that students could have more options as writers. A part of me felt justified: Why did students need to know the names of the constructions they were writing? The point of grammar at this time—and in my mind—was to improve writing. Knowing terminology didn't necessarily help writers write better.

Another thing about this practice: There wasn't a plan to our study. We mostly played around with sentences and then plopped the practiced structures into whatever it was we were writing. And, as part of how I understood grammar in context, I would ask students, when they were polishing a piece of writing, to use two of the patterns we had been practicing in class in their polished writing—and identify them in the draft they turned in for a grade. When a student embedded sentences modeled after some elaborate sentences from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address into a paper on skateboarding, I knew something had to change. Even the student understood that something was wrong. Granted she went overboard, using many imitated structures beyond the two I had asked for, but she recognized that the tone of the essay made skateboarding sound like something much more important. She saw that the sentence structures—with their parallelism, antithesis, and verbals—helped create a tone that wasn't quite appropriate for her purpose and topic. I began to understand that I needed to help my students learn

more than just sentence structures if I wanted language study to help them as writers.

About the same time, I learned about sentence combining (Strong) and thought that might also be a way to help students learn grammar in context. I used some sentence combining exercises from books, and students (for the most part) liked the combining activities. I started out, though, with that same old dichotomy: right and wrong. Students joined the kernel sentences into a combination that I matched with the answers in the book. Even when I made my own sets of kernel sentences by de-combining sentences from our reading (Dean), I compared my students' responses to the original sentence. I soon realized, however, that although some of my students' combinations did not match the original sentence I had used, those combinations were not *wrong*. They were just different.

I shifted my perspective again. Instead, I asked students to combine sets of kernel sentences in at least two ways and then share their favorite, explaining why they preferred it. We talked about sentences, not just for their rightness or wrongness, but for what effect they had. For example, we might have had the following three sentences suggested from a combining practice. My questions to students would be these: How do these sentences differ? When might we choose one over another?

- The dog, driven crazy by thirst, jumped over the cliff into the river below.
- Driven crazy by thirst, the dog jumped over the cliff into the river below.
- The dog jumped over the cliff into the river below because he was crazy with thirst.

This conversation was no longer just about right and wrong. There was not a single "right" answer. And we were talking a lot more: using language to learn about language, and considering situation as part of our talk.

The talk that surrounded our work with sentence combining and sentence imitation became integral to our work with language—and I learned a valuable lesson that contributed to my developing perspective: teaching about language without talking is almost useless. We had to have discussions about grammar and its uses and effects for students to make real sense of what they were doing. Even more importantly, we were learning that there isn't a single, right answer; language effectiveness shifts with situation—and our talk helped us develop this changed perspective. I began to consider what Rei Noguchi observed: that grammar instruction often neglects meaning and meaning relationships (9). My students and I needed to consider that certain kinds of language usage and sentence constructions helped accomplish the purposes—meanings—of specific kinds of texts better than others. That's when I started trying to match language practices/instruction to genre as much as I could.

Present Tense

In my present perspective, I'm still using imitation and combining, but now I match the sentences we imitate or combine with the genre we are writing. Contemporary genre theory helps us understand that genres are textual responses to specific situations, not merely text types (Miller). Situations require participants to interact, and those interactions reflect the nuances of the situation and the participants involved in it. By considering the kinds of language (grammar) that "make a particular text the type of text it is" (Schleppegrell 183), students not only learn grammar in the context of reading and writing, they also learn how grammar can more intimately connect to meaning. That's definitely a shift in perspective.

This present shift is not an easy one to make: There are still some students who want to know "the" right answer and who are uncomfortable with the flexibility of this approach to language instruction—and some teachers and parents feel the same way. And there are other students who like the flexibility and go completely overboard in the opposite direction, thinking there is never a "right" way to use language (what I would call the best or most appropriate choice for a situation). But overall, we are learning that language—grammar—isn't a single construct. We are learning that what we mean by grammar is bigger than identifying parts of speech or even using standard usage expectations. It's not grammar so much as language. We are learning that language is like most of life: about making the best choices out of the options available in our particular situation. So our language work involves

learning the range of options available for different situations—and that requires us to shift perspectives again, repeatedly.

Because of genre considerations, part of the present-tense perspective requires, as well, more attention to rhetorical situation than my previous perspective considered. When students understand that grammar relates to situation and genre, they can understand that text-speak is appropriate language/grammar for a particular situation—texting—but may not be appropriate for a college application or the AP exam or an email to complain about a defective cell phone. Teaching language from a genre approach helps students understand how to marshal their language skills for specific tasks instead of seeing language as a unitary concept. Students learn code-switching, adjusting their language for different genres: different kinds of structures and different expectations for different audiences.

But teaching from a genre perspective has other challenges, too. A genre approach, with its clear connection between language and situation, seems to be my answer—finally—about how to teach language. But my students' responses require me to enlarge my perspective again. When I match grammatical structures to genres, I sometimes find that students gain only a limited understanding of what I am trying to teach. The structures become something like a formula attached to the genre. So, for example, students might think that they only use appositives in movie reviews just because that is where we study them and consciously incorporate them for a class assignment. It's true that appositives are evident and useful in movie reviews—but, obviously, appositives can also be useful structures in other genres as well. Moving from formulaic use of grammar in genres to appropriate use of them in other genres involves a little more than what I had been doing.

In order to learn this strategic approach to language use, I need to make sure that students are exposed to lots of texts. More than exposure, they need *immersion* in texts of all kinds. It's hard to see how language use in one context differs from or is similar to that in another if a person isn't exposed to very many kinds of texts. Through exposure to multiple kinds of texts, students are more likely to view genres as scenes of both choice and constraint, of both expectations and flexibility. Language use in genres is similar: appositives may be an expectation for reviews (they help to present information efficiently), but the use of direct quotes might be an option since not all reviews use them. The only way to get at these choices, at both the expectations and the options, is through immersion, comparison, and talk. A lot of talk.

Students need to learn how to think about language use in texts and how to consider the differences and similarities. For instance, after reading several examples of a genre, let's say of online book reviews, students and teachers consider the following questions:

- What do we notice about the language of this genre? How formal or informal is it?
- What do we notice about the way the sentences are structured? Are there similar kinds of sentences?
- What language regularities do you notice across several examples? What language choices do you see only in one or two examples?
- How do these choices compare and contrast to choices in other genres you are familiar with?
- How could the language choices reflect the situation of this genre, its users (writers and readers—and their relationship to each other) and its place (online or in print, for example)?

As is probably obvious, this kind of talk takes time. The immersion in multiple versions of texts takes time. Our preparation so that we have some ideas to guide students through this kind of exploration (even if they notice things you didn't) takes time. And then helping students learn how to construct the kinds of structures or use the kind of language they notice in the genre takes time. This need for time is a challenge, but making the time is worth the effort. When students understand this process, they can transfer the thinking to other genres and other situations. We don't have to teach every genre; we can teach a way of approaching them that will make students more effective language users after our class ends—not just students who can re-create the few genres we had time to teach them in our course.

This talk, essential to language learning, also requires me to bring some use of grammatical terminology back into my classroom. It's difficult to explain to students why subject-verb agreement creates credibility in an online response to a news article, for example, if they don't know what I mean by subject or verb. In my past-tense perspective, I focused on writing. And, quite frankly, most writers—even students—can do more with written and spoken language than they can explain grammatically. I don't think that's a bad thing. I can drive a car, but I can't name the parts of its engine. And I know lots of articulate people who can't tell a gerund from a present participle, but they use them both frequently and effectively. However when we have to talk about language—and with a genre approach we have to talk a lot—some common terminology is necessary. A few terms, really: subject, verb, clause, phrase, modifier, completer.

A key difference to my present use of terminology is that these terms are not meant to be something learned for a test or practiced on worksheets. I usually introduce the terms we need as we are talking about the language of a text and examining what it does. So, for example, I can bring up pronouns during our reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird,* in Atticus's final speech to the jury. If students notice his use of pronouns (Who is called by name and who is referred to almost solely by pronouns—and what is the effect of those language choices?), they learn the terms in the context of talking about effect, not as a separate lesson. Not on a worksheet. I teach subjects and verbs (and other concepts) as part of our reading and writing activities, as a way to understand how certain language choices create effects. Some choices may hinder students' chances of being taken seriously online; they need to understand why. This use of terminology is not simply so that they can identify the subject of a sentence on a quiz or a worksheet. This embedded, integrated, real-life applied approach is a different way to consider grammatical terminology, one that fits with the present genre perspective on language.

Future Tense

What shifts in perspective will the future require? It's not hard to predict that much of our students' future use of written language will be online, and, as a website sponsored by Michigan State University notes, "Computers are not 'just tools' for writing. Networked computers create a new kind of writing space that changes the writing process and the basic rhetorical dynamic between writers and readers" ("Why Teach"). The language our students will need to know for the future will be language that will help them navigate the digital world—and these new writing spaces—effectively. The closeness between writers and readers will require a care with language that might not have been necessary with the paper-writing more common in the past. I recall a couple of online news articles I have read recently where the comments following the article went off-topic. Instead of commenting on the content of the previous comment with which they disagreed, readers began attacking the language a commenter used, essentially sending this message: "How can anything you say be valid if you can't even use language effectively?" The use of language as representative of ethos, even down to issues of spelling and usage, will be even more important in the close connections between readers and writers in the future. Our students will need to learn to consider these issues through the language instruction they receive.

Another future consideration is that students will be writing in many environments even though it may look like they are in only a few: on their phones or on their computers (which more and more are beginning to be the same device). What I mean by environments is the places students go online to communicate; those can be widely different in expectations. A consideration for future learning about language, then, should include the uses of language that will help students as they move among different online writing situations. Texting will use one kind of grammar (syntax, usage, spelling, etc.), while a website or blog will have different expectations, and the type of blog (political or personal, for instance) will also make a difference. Moving among these will require a wide range of language options, and our students will need to learn even more effective skills for knowing how to adapt to these different situations and their expectations. Their writing in online environments will require even greater consideration of rhetorical situation: register, audience, and tone, particularly. We will need to help them see through the

similarity of tool (keyboard) to the variety in genre by working even more diligently to help them learn how genres situate writers and readers, even online, not just in physical spaces.

Another way online writing will differ from paper writing will be in length; brevity may be more valued than it is currently (140 characters, as in a tweet). Part of this expectation for shortness will be related to the reading characteristics typical of online readers:

- Online readers don't like to scroll through long texts (Nielsen), so texts will generally be limited in length.
- Online readers scan more than they read (Nielsen), so writers will need to be engaging as well as clear so as not to confuse fast "readers."

As Jim Burke notes, "tomorrow's writers will need to be able to convey detailed information in concise language about the length of a haiku" (374). Maybe not a mere 17 syllables, but you get the point.

In a recent conference presentation, Nate Kreuter noted another element that may be part of the future perspective. When we go online, he explains, "Information is not in short supply. Attention is." He suggests that one key to effective communication in this new writing space might be style—an idea that should inform future shifts in perspective. At the same conference, Brian Jackson referred to "pinging," the use of short, directed passages of text that will be typical of future communications. According to Jackson, this characteristic of future texts means that the power of the sentence can be taught "as a full rhetorical strategy in its own right." Sentences. And style. Two possible shifts for future perspectives.

Partly related to style, another aspect of language in future digital environments will be its persuasiveness. Many of the ways writers use language online will be persuasive in nature to one degree or another, arguments both subtle and overt: websites, blogs, commentaries, and comments. Even selling. I think of a posting on eBay I found a few years ago. The last time I visited the posting, the writer, a mother who had taken all her children to the store with her, was being offered more than $100 for an opened package of Pokemon cards, something she'd purchased without realizing it. Why did she get such a high offer? It was her writing. She told an interesting, funny story of how she ended up with the cards. Her piece wasn't overtly persuasive, but it was engaging—and, in its particular situation, persuasive because of that. In digital writing, students will need to be able to use language to inform and to persuade, to build arguments in a variety of ways—generally with a close audience and the possibility for the audience to respond, almost immediately, to their use of language. Writers will need to convince readers in many different situations. This knowledge should definitely contribute to a shift in future perspectives.

And So . . .

Shifting perspectives has been the story of my teaching life, perhaps the story of teaching grammar and language in general over the last 25 years. And shifting perspectives is essential to teaching grammar and language today and in the future. Teaching for today and tomorrow requires a more increased awareness of language use and language options in the world around us than was probably suggested by the training most English teachers received in the past. If we really want to help students see language as important to them, as essential to their lives (as I hope they will), teachers will need to develop this broader perspective, this greater awareness of language and its uses in a wider variety of situations. We need to shift perspectives from the narrower ones that may represent our own education or training, and we will need to continue to shift perspectives to adapt to the wonderful ways that language works in all aspects of our students' worlds. EJ

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Ligatures

New England Primer, 1727

More closely than others
some letters are bound,

as cords of pigment lash them,
inseparable.

The *s* and *h* in *shall* create
a single shape, in lead,

then ink—the *l* and *t* in *shalt not*
pressed so tightly together

they make one body, man and wife
conceiving their children in sin:

seamlessly *f* slides into *l*
in *flesh*—the *s* into *l* in *slips.*

And *c* can't escape
the *t* of *affliction*—

while, more elaborate,

the *rod of correction*'s ligature
arcs: a small whip.

Sometimes, in *Christ,*
a perfect hill to climb
yokes the *s* and *t.*

First, last—*stray*
as *instructed.*

Least, most, grapple
with wandering *Lusts*

and *Affections.*

Hasten, blast—in *strict*
justice. Everlasting.

—Martha Carlson-Bradley

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Martha Carlson-Bradley has published one full-length book, *Season We Can't Resist* (WordTech, 2007), and two chapbooks, *Beast at the Hearth* (Adastra, 2005) and *Nest Full of Cries* (Adastra, 2000). Her work has appeared in several literary magazines, including the *New England Review, Carolina Quarterly, Beloit Poetry Journal,* and *Spoon River Poetry Review.* As a creative arts fellow at the American Antiquarian Society in 2008, she did research on the *New England Primer* for a collection of poems in progress. She may be reached at martha@mcarlson-bradley.com.

Jill Ewing Flynn

The Language of Power: Beyond the Grammar Workbook

The author describes an eighth-grade language unit that helps students understand the value of dialects and standardized English.

> You're speaking the language of power or whatever! I never heard you talk like that before.
>
> —*Ana, a student in Mr. Ramsey's eighth-grade English class*

In her comment above, Ana expressed her surprise at the speech of her principal, Mr. Johnson, after hearing him in a meeting with her teachers. Ana had been studying dialects and grammar as a part of a Language of Power unit created and taught by Mr. Ramsey. While Mr. Johnson's staff was surely familiar with his use of Standard English, Ana was used to chatting with the principal in the hallway, using an informal, conversational tone peppered with slang and jokes. In her surprised comment—and the conversation that followed—Ana showed how she, like many of Mr. Ramsey's students, was coming to understand the concept of code-switching and the importance of audience in determining one's speech, important lessons for students to learn when studying our English language.

The National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar (ATEG) has given us some thought-provoking questions to consider as we integrate language instruction into the English curriculum. ATEG identifies a number of goals, which are articulated in *Grammar Alive! A Guide for Teachers,* a helpful text by Brock Haussamen, Amy Benjamin, Martha Kolln, and Rebecca S. Wheeler. Goal A states that "Every student, from every background, will complete school with the ability to communicate comfortably and effectively in both spoken and written Standard English, with awareness of when use of Standard English is appropriate" (Haussamen et al. 4).[1] Goal C urges us to ensure that "Every student will complete school with an understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural variation that occurs in language across time, social situation, and social group. While recognizing the need for mastering Standard English, students will also demonstrate an understanding of the equality in the expressive capacity and linguistic structure among a range of language varieties both vernacular and standard, as well as an understanding of language-based prejudice" (4). These two goals were achieved by many of Mr. Ramsey's eighth-grade students.

Studying Mr. Ramsey's Class

I studied Mr. Ramsey's classroom as a part of a qualitative research project on discussions of race and culture that occurred in the eighth-grade curriculum at a public middle school in the Midwest. I spent an average of three days per week at the school from October 2007 until June 2008. The school's population is 60–65% white; most of the students of color are African American. The school is quite diverse economically. Because it has an arts magnet focus as well as a strong reputation in the community, it draws families both from the suburban area where it is located as well as the urban center that it borders. Mr. Ramsey was in his second year of teaching at the time of the study. In this article, I discuss a unit that incorporated explicit instruction about how language can be used and viewed in multiple

ways, with the goal of teaching the "language of power"—formal, so-called Standard English—as a tool for achieving school success.

One of the reasons I chose to study Mr. Ramsey and his students was the school's focus on issues of race and culture. In an interview I conducted with Mr. Ramsey, he noted that discussing the "language of power" was a way into issues of racism and privilege. He attributed some of the achievement gap that plagues American schools to the mismatch between students' home languages and the language expected in the classroom. As a result, he valued grammar instruction that taught the rules and patterns of Standard English in a way that did not devalue or belittle the languages students brought from their homes and communities.

The Language of Power Unit

Mr. Ramsey identified three main goals for the "language of power" unit. First, he wanted to help students understand "how language is culturally constructed." Next, he wanted to emphasize that the issue is one of access, not correctness; he did not want to present Standard English as the one pure way we should write and speak. Rather, he sought to show students how knowledge and understanding of this language variety would give them a tool that could help open doors in academia and some professional settings. Finally, he wanted to make explicit that those in power, not the inherent value of a language variety, help determine "correctness." Standard English is not the language commonly used in school because it is "best" of all American English language varieties.

Some of Mr. Ramsey's thoughts and objectives are inspired by the work of Lisa Delpit. Delpit explains how, for many students of color, it is difficult to navigate the terrain of school, based as it is in white, middle-class values and practices, including a dialect close to Standard English in speaking and writing. In her groundbreaking work *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom,* Delpit finds fault with "progressive" pedagogy, such as writers' and readers' workshops. She argues that the needs of students of color are not met with such student-centered, choice-based teaching; instead, those whose cultural practices may not match those valued in schools need to be explicitly taught the rules and norms of the culture of power—not in hopes of assimilation and indoctrination, but to allow students to understand what is expected of them so that they can succeed within a flawed system. (For a list of Delpit's main tenets regarding the culture of power, see fig. 1.) Many of these ideas guided Mr. Ramsey's Language of Power unit.

FIGURE 1. *The Culture of Power* (from Delpit's *Other People's Children*)

1. Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.
2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a "culture of power."
3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.
4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
5. Those with power are frequently least aware of—or least willing to acknowledge—its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (24)

Mr. Ramsey began the unit by explaining what he meant by "language of power." Equating it with Standard English, he described it as the language students would use on a college or high school application. As eighth graders, some of his students were applying to charter or private high schools, and the vast majority expected to attend college. For the first instructional activity, students brainstormed a list of dialects (see fig. 2). Students discussed how people in different areas of the country speak differently; for example, Tyler explained how his cousins in Texas had a southern drawl. Students also noted that there are slang and other speech patterns that are unique to the racial or ethnic

FIGURE 2. List of Brainstormed Dialects

___ Texas
___ Child/parent
___ Dinner table
___ Friends
___ Home
___ Family
___ School
- Teachers
- Friends

___ Texting
___ Sports
___ Military
___ Police
___ Romantic/flirting
___ Professional
___ Auctions
___ Church
___ Indoor/outdoor
___ Baby-Puppy-Kitty
___ Dance
___ Music
___ Elders
___ Race/culture

backgrounds of the speakers. Finally, students said that to whom they were speaking—parents, friends, teachers—also determined the type of language they used. (An amusing example of this idea from their list is "Baby-Puppy-Kitty": something like "Awww . . . wook at da cute wittwe guy!")

To supplement these classroom activities, students read Gary Soto's *Novio Boy.* This short play tells the tale of a Mexican American boy going on a first date, and it allowed Mr. Ramsey to use literature to examine language issues, as the characters sometimes speak English, sometimes Spanish, and sometimes a combination of the two. Using a play was particularly appropriate, as students read the characters' speech aloud. Mr. Ramsey had the class stop and discuss not only how the protagonist Rudy and his friends and family were speaking but also how the students in the class gave voice to the characters in their dramatic reading.

Students produced a number of texts themselves over the course of the Language of Power unit. They wrote a monologue in a dialect and then created a list of rules and guidelines for the dialect they chose (directions for the assignment appear in fig. 3). Next, they switched rule sheets with a partner and changed their own monologue using their classmate's guidelines, rewriting the speech in another dialect. When students struggled with this task, Mr. Ramsey explained, "Part of what I want you to see is that it's hard to write on one page the rules for a dialect." Students also produced a language autobiography: an essay describing the language varieties they spoke and how they came to know them. In addition, they wrote a "translation" of a college admissions essay into a dialect "as far away from the language of power as possible." Mr. Ramsey explained that students were usually engaged in the task of interpreting in the other direction: "You already translate in your writing: for example, you take out ums and ahs when you write. For this writing, keep them in." Through these assignments, students practiced varying their language according to audience, trying on different voices and dialects.

FIGURE 3. Guidelines for the Dialect Instruction Sheet

1. What are the basics of the language? Are the sentences long or short? Is it emotional or not? Is it quiet, loud, aggressive, passive?
2. What kinds of words are used? Create a mini-dictionary if needed.
3. How formal or informal is the language?
4. What special rules for grammar or spelling are there? Is it mostly spoken or written?
5. Give one example of a sentence written in this language.

For one of the unit's major projects, students worked in small groups to create a skit that had to incorporate three language varieties, including Standard English. The students chose partners to work with and developed scenarios in which people who spoke different dialects might come together. One group performed a newscast with various types of stories (entertainment, sports, interviews); another portrayed strangers stuck in an elevator. A third told the story of a plane crashing on a desert island. Students wrote, rehearsed, and performed these skits in front of the whole class. After each, Mr. Ramsey led the class through a debriefing of what the performance showed about language.

Other strategies included additional oral as well as written work. Mr. Ramsey came up with the Like/Uh/Um Battle as a fun, educational activity after several days of standardized testing. For this contest, students were given a topic to discuss and competed against one another to see who could talk the longest without filler words such as *like, uh,* and *um.* Mr. Ramsey said that some of these words were part of their generational language: "We're playing with how much the teenage dialect is hardwired into your brain." Finally, students also completed exercises in a grammar workbook. While this activity is a traditional one, Mr. Ramsey worked to explain it in terms of the unit's focus. When students completed an exercise in which they had to choose the correct form of a pronoun, he commented, "Pronouns are a marker of the language of power—mistakes with them stick out. I see a lot of mistakes with them in your writing." He identified the use of the formally accepted pronoun case as an

For one of the unit's major projects, students worked in small groups to create a skit that had to incorporate three language varieties, including Standard English. The students chose partners to work with and developed scenarios in which people who spoke different dialects might come together.

important feature of Standard English, one that they needed to be familiar with.

Measuring Success

In what ways was Mr. Ramsey's Language of Power unit successful? First, these discussions about language and power were productive ones. Many students demonstrated an understanding in their classroom comments that audience determines dialect. Ana showed her understanding of code-switching when she remarked on Mr. Johnson's professional language. In addition, both the students and the teacher made explicit connections between issues of language and power and ideas about ethnocentrism and culture, which they were examining in Social Studies class. They were able to talk about how one culture is not inherently "right," how our value judgments are determined by our time, place, and upbringing. Such cross-curricular connections enhanced student learning and facilitated discussions of racism and privilege later in the year. Understanding how Standard English is just one of many potential language varieties was important. Yet at the same time, Mr. Ramsey helped students learn the conventions of Standard English, giving them the skills they needed to navigate academia. As Delpit advocates, "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier" (24).

There were also parts of the unit that were not as successful. One of the major assessments, the dialect skit, revealed some difficulties. The performances were uneven: some students showed mastery of the dialects presented; others did not. While many students' comments indicated that they grasped the importance of audience, not all of the projects demonstrated this understanding. Also problematic was the students'—and occasionally Mr. Ramsey's—association of Standard English with terms such as *proper, snooty,* and *big words.* While some of those connotations may be justified, Standard English is more than mere snobbery. Finally, students' long-term retention of these ideas is unknown. When students were surveyed in June about their most meaningful learning experiences, only three students out of 31 identified this unit as especially important. Nevertheless, it is true that subsequent discussions that occurred in English and Social Studies built on some of the knowledge that students gained through studying the "language of power."

My teaching experience shows—and research confirms—that relying only on grammar workbook exercises is not an effective way to teach students about the English language. I hope that the work of Mr. Ramsey and his students inspires readers to consider how they might work to teach Standard English as well as the other diverse language varieties that we encounter in our classrooms and the world at large.

The "language of power"—when to use it, as well as its limitations—is indeed a necessary and rich subject of study in our English classes.

Note

1. For a more thorough discussion on the terminology related to Standard English, see pages 3–5 of *Grammar Alive!* As Haussamen et al. point out, this language variety is "standard not in the sense that it is better English than other varieties but in the sense that it is the widely recognized and codified version of English" (4).

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Exploring Language and Identity: Amy Tan's 'Mother Tongue' and Beyond," students brainstorm the different languages they use in speaking and writing and when and where these languages are appropriate. They write in their journals about a time when someone made an assumption about them based on their use of language, share their writing with the class, and apply their experiences to readings of "Mother Tongue." Finally, students write a literacy narrative describing two different languages they use and when and where they use them.
http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-language-identity-mother-910.html

Darren Crovitz

Sudden Possibilities: Porpoises, Eggcorns, and Error

Inspired by Mina Shaunessey's open-minded approach to student error, Crovitz suggests playful ways to learn from mistakes. Many classroom activities are described.

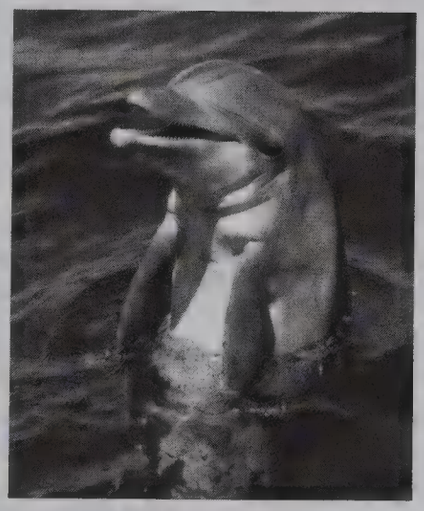
Give me fruitful error any time, full of seeds, bursting with its own corrections.

—*Vilfredo Pareto*

My Porpoise

If you attended an American elementary school in the latter half of the 20th century, you probably remember *Highlights* magazine as a staple text. My own fourth-grade classroom had a stack of them on a corner shelf, available for browsing if we finished our work early. Even in the 1970s the magazine had an old-fashioned feel to it with its Rockwell-esque line drawings and wholesome content, but there were always enough puzzles and curious stories in a typical issue to keep my attention.

There was only one problem with *Highlights* that I could see as a nine-year-old. Like most kids I was fascinated by animals, and each copy of the magazine seemed to promise an interesting article about playing with marine life. It was right there on every front cover, in small letters directly below the magazine's title: "Fun with a Porpoise." I could imagine this article easily—probably a story about a lucky group of kids in some tropical locale who got to swim with these smiling creatures on a regular basis—but when I looked through the magazine, I could never find it.



Making an error on porpoise can be educational. (© Tom Brakefield/ Photos.com)

I don't know how long this error continued, but in what must count as an early experience with epiphany I realized at some point that the subtitle of the magazine was not "Fun with a Porpoise," but "Fun with a *Purpose.*" In retrospect, my mistake seems understandable. I remember my formal language instruction in those early years as a mixture of phonics and contextualism; when I encountered a strange word—which was fairly often, since I enjoyed reading—I'd been told by my parents and teachers to "sound it out" as an aid to comprehension, and this tactic (combined with an awareness of context) had generally served me well. Given my interests at that age and my awareness that *Highlights* contained content for a young audience, *porpoise* seemed like a logical interpretation of the word on the cover. It wasn't that I didn't know the word *purpose*—I probably did—but its more abstract nature was likely trumped by the concrete appeal of an interesting animal. Developmental learning theorists might see me thinking in a concrete operational sense, with *porpoise* having a lot more potential relevance and interest to me than a less tangible concept such as *purpose.*

I think of this childhood experience when I come across similar misinterpretations, misspellings, and mistakes in student writing. Perhaps our first reaction as English teachers is to see such blunders as evidence of how disconnected students today seem with written language. We shake our heads when we see these malapropisms in student papers, offering them up as jokes to colleagues: *taken for granted*

written as *taken for granite,* for example, or *voilá!* spelled as *walla!* Such mistakes might easily serve as sad evidence of reading habits nowadays and how careless young people seem to be with language. When William Savage mocks the written "stupidities" created by undergraduate "illiterates" in his history courses, surely most of us can understand his frustration if not appreciate his sarcasm (223–25).

Gradually, however, my thinking has changed. Perhaps if we look closely at such errors, we might instead see students grappling with meaning rather than simply being careless or stupid. Language is learned through a process of experimentation, error-making, and self-correction. Now that I'm a teacher of teachers, I wonder how we might put such common interpretive errors to an educative use. There is usually logic in how we negotiate meaning through language, even when we do so incorrectly. How can we acknowledge the thinking that might be happening in common kinds of errors while building on this awareness to help students be more self-reflective as they encounter and interpret unfamiliar words and phrases?

Error Analysis and Practice

The notion that close analysis of language errors can yield insight into how we think and learn seems fundamentally obvious. Yet until relatively recently, language errors were primarily treated as indicators of learner deficiency rather than opportunities to consider a student's individual cognitive context and so reconsider and adapt instruction.

Through close analysis of the errors made by basic writers, Mina Shaughnessy's groundbreaking *Errors and Expectations,* first published in 1977, explores the need for teachers to consider the "whys" behind apparent mistakes. Shaughnessy argues that the aspects of basic writing that most frustrate teachers—seemingly sloppy surface errors—often carry unseen educative potential:

> [Basic writers] write the way they do, not because they are slow or non-verbal . . . but because they are beginners and must, like all beginners, learn by making mistakes. . . . [T]he inexperienced teacher is almost certain to see nothing but a chaos of errors when he first encounters their papers. Yet a closer look will reveal very little that is random or "illogical" in what they have written. And the keys to their development as writers often lie hidden in the very features of their writing that English teachers have been trained to brush aside with a marginal code letter or a scribbled injunction to "Proofread!" (5)

A punitive emphasis on correctness, Shaughnessy argues, can actually have the opposite of its intended effect on basic writers, stifling their experiments with language for fear of failure (8). A reflection on the rationale of error-making must extend beyond a student's apparent inability to memorize and apply a rule, toward deeper considerations: "a teacher who would work with [basic writers] might well begin by trying to understand the logic of their mistakes in order to determine at what point or points along the developmental path error should or can become a subject for instruction" (13).

A pragmatist, Shaughnessy is ultimately concerned with students' ability to succeed given dominant language expectations. Teachers must be aware of the complexity and sophistication that underlie a writer's development while resisting behaviorist notions of rote learning that assign negative implications to error-making, all while considering the real-world impact of errors on particular audiences. Her work is seen by many as fundamental in the shift to a more developmentally informed view of how students learn language and is echoed in the efforts of scholars such as Rei Noguchi and Constance Weaver, who have argued for judicious writing-embedded grammar instruction "that begins with what students know and proceed[s] to what they need to know" (Kenkel and Yates 36). Conventional notions of grammatical errors and how to correct them, however, are difficult to dislodge.

How is error analysis typically dealt with in an English classroom? We might consider one common example: Daily Oral Language (DOL) activities—or the similar Daily Grammar Practice (DGP)—in which, as a class, students examine a sample sentence written on the board (or projected onto an overhead or interactive whiteboard screen) to locate and correct multiple errors (see fig. 1).

Typically, teachers ask students to write down the sentence and make necessary corrections before

FIGURE 1. Typical Daily Oral Language Sentence

yesterday i laid down in the hammock and read tom sawyer a novel by mark twain

calling on individual students for recommended changes. Many teachers begin every lesson with a DOL exercise, and in some classrooms students see the same sentence all week, addressing specific problems (punctuation, agreement, capitalization, etc.) each day.

With the pressures of standardized exams that may still test knowledge of grammar rules in isolation, the argument for this kind of regular grammar practice is understandable. Such exercises can perhaps teach students to recognize, identify, and correct common grammatical and usage errors (at least when they are presented within an isolated error-riddled sentence). DOL and DGP activities are also popular with teachers for a purely practical reason: they chew up 10–15 minutes at the beginning of each class, and thus make for easier lesson planning. To the extent that students are asked to *think critically* about typical sentence-level errors, however, the DOL approach is questionable at best, and I've never heard much argument that such exercises generate any sustained student interest or curiosity in how language and words actually work.

As usually employed, DOL exercises do not emerge from a student's own writing; many teachers use prepackaged classroom guides that provide lists of hundreds of such sentences. Since students see only one detached and random sentence at a time, the errors within exist in a vacuum, which is to say that they are contextually generic as opposed to specific to any individual's real language use. As Weaver, Noguchi, and a host of other grammar researchers have shown, isolated exercises of this sort do not translate into more grammatically correct student writing. Weaver's summary of the research mentions that student writing may actually *worsen* with such an approach since isolated grammar activities take up instructional time that might be better used (10).

DOL exercises also use a traditional grammar instruction tactic: sample sentences are chosen for how clearly they violate a limited set of grammatical rules. Sentences that expose the complexities of—or exceptions to—rules (and they are legion) are simply ignored. This is an instructional stance that presumes simple definition repetition as the key to better grammar. Patrick Hartwell has pointed out the solipsism of such methods, since the rules themselves are clear only if one already understands them; grammatical fluency emerges not from rule recall but through contextual practice (438). DOL activities are also unlikely to deal with how meaning is construed within varying contexts and for different audiences.

Essentially, DOL-type exercises ask students to apply knowledge of standard grammar rules in an arbitrary, context-free situation using safe, cherry-picked samples containing rule-specific mistakes. Rarely does discussion dwell on *why* writers make errors, just that they do and that they need to be fixed (the behaviorist presumption being that they simply haven't bothered to learn the rules well enough, perhaps by not completing enough DOL exercises). There is little exploration of the audience effects of grammatical inappropriateness, much less Shaughnessy's call for "a readiness to look at [errors] in a way that does not ignore linguistic sophistication" (13). Put simply, Daily Oral Language–type activities present a narrow and simplistic view of language use and appropriateness, reducing error analysis to a formulaic, convenient, and exam-justifiable routine.

Meanwhile, the age-old negative feedback loop of student error-making remains. Most students suffer through these daily rituals without noticeable improvement in their actual language use, and teachers continue to do what they've always done regarding student mistakes—mark them in papers, deduct points, and wonder why these kids just don't ever seem to get it.

Eggcorns: One Example of Thinking Differently about Errors

What follows is not a formal set of explicit recommendations for what teachers should be doing with class time already crammed with curricular requirements, departmental demands, test preparation, and other mandates. It's one thing to say that if teachers are going to spend ten minutes of every class period discussing language errors, there are probably better, more engaging, and more cognitively compelling ways of doing so than disconnected DOL-type exercises (see the sidebar for a list of possibilities). It can be a challenge to deviate from the expectations of a department or district by developing alternative activities that privilege thinking, creativity, and constructive language use rather than just coverage and rule repetition.

Consider the kind of errors of interpretation that begin this essay, in which students substitute their own conceptions of words and phrases they've heard, as in *granite* for *granted.* This kind of error is a favorite whipping boy of educational naysayers, and yet, as Mark Peters points out in "Like a Bowl in a China Shop," such errors of interpretation open up possibilities for discussing with students the mechanics of sense-making. Known as *eggcorns* (a mishearing of *acorns*), these mistakes are usually the result of a quasi-logical deduction; they make an intuitive sense, as Peters points out. A student hears the word *acorn* but, unfamiliar with the word's written form, makes a speculative grasp at meaning based on phonetics and pragmatics. *Eggcorn* may strike us as initially ridiculous. But if we realize that acorns are in their nature as seeds analogous to *eggs,* and that *corn* can refer to both the plant and the seed-like kernel, we can start to unravel the folkloric reasoning behind the word's inception.

Similarly, what logic might be present in a phrase like *taken for granite?* Again we have a student's guess at meaning based on a common pronunciation of *granted* which softens the "t" sound ("grannet"). Since granite is a very hard rock, virtually immovable, we might imagine that a belief that is *taken for granite* is one which is solidly unquestionable and fundamental . . . or at least, a belief that is treated as such, which is not too far from the actual meaning of the original phrase. In the sense that *taken for granted* requires a more conceptual and abstract understanding of vocabulary, the concrete appeal of *granite* is likely more understandable to many students, similar to my own *porpoise/purpose* misreading.

What if instead of a usual DOL activity, teachers asked students to consider a typical eggcorn—or similar language oddity—and the behind-the-scenes rationale for its existence? "If students become eggcorn hunters," Peters argues, "they would have to pay attention to not only what's being said but how it is articulated. They would have to question expressions that may seem perfectly acceptable and consult the dictionary to see whether 'throws of passion' or 'throes of passion' is correct."

As a way to think about constructive uses for eggcorns, I asked my students—all of whom were preservice English teachers—to examine typical eggcorns for the reasoning that might lie beneath. I gave each group a list to analyze, evaluate, and discuss (a list of eggcorns is available online at http://eggcorns.lascribe.net/browse-eggcorns/ and on Wikipedia). I asked students to work in pairs to formulate a rationale for why someone might logically arrive at these misinterpretations, and we then examined each as a class. A list of terms appears in Figure 2, along with the consensus we reached as a class about the probable thinking process behind each.

The basic idea underpinning the kind of eggcorn analysis in Figure 2—that errors are not always random, that we might be able to understand why they happen, and that this knowledge might somehow give us a broader picture of language miscues without the threat of punishment—can be extended to other common arenas. Word-processing programs have made computer-generated student writing commonplace over the last two decades while also creating a peculiarly modern form of linguistic mistake: the spellcheck-sanctioned error. Thus a student essay might focus on an argument's *clams* (claims), refer to a politician's *manor* (manner) of speech, and *defiantly* (definitely) agree with a text's main idea. As these errors are machine-supplied substitutes for misspellings, many of them may not reveal much in the way of logic—the program simply scans a document against an internal database and offers possible corrections—although they do open space to discuss connotation and association. With the *manor* error above, we might imagine a filibustering senator creating an elaborate mansion of words full of rooms made ornate by metaphor, or ask how we might expect one *from the manor born* to speak. In doing so, we can envision a lesson that differentiates homonyms while building on the sudden opportunities the error has revealed. Similarly, the new meaning created by a writer inadvertently ending up *defiantly* agreeing might lead into a brief discussion about tone, voice, and audience. In this case it's a mistake, but what contexts might call for such a bold adverb? When would it be appropriate to take such a linguistic stand, Nathan Hale style?

Obviously not all spellchecking errors lend themselves to rich exploration; there may not be much informing, accidentally or otherwise, a student's use of *form* throughout an essay when *from* is the intended word. But such errors still carry potential for practical minilessons dealing with critical evaluation. A spellchecking program, after all, is little more than a software algorithm designed to apply a given set of rules to writing regardless of

FIGURE 2. Eggcorn Analysis

CORRECT WORD OR PHRASE	EGGCORN	ERROR EXPLANATION
Alzheimer's disease	"old timers disease"	An illness often associated with the elderly; "Alzheimer" might not be recognized as a proper noun; it is also not a common name and so it's more susceptible to mishearing and misinterpretation
prima donna	"pre-Madonna"	"Prima donna" is Italian and was initially used in a field unfamiliar to most young people (opera); Madonna is a pop icon viewed as a role model for girls aspiring to fame; those affecting such a pose (wannabe glamorous) might be labeled "pre-Madonnas," as might young female pop singers
a long row to hoe	"a long road to haul"	Farming activity ("Hoeing rows") is less familiar to some modern audiences; a trucking metaphor may be more common and carry a similar meaning
A dog-eat-dog world	"a doggie dog world"	The phrase "dog-eat-dog" may have fallen out of usage; rapper Snoop Dogg's fame gives the eggcorn a new kind of meaning, perhaps related to a tough pose
toe the line	"tow the line"	"Toe the line" is a specific military reference that uses a verb more commonly employed as a noun; the eggcorn uses a more familiar verb that connotes laborious effort instead of discipline
shudder at the thought	"shutter at the thought"	The "dd" and "tt" sounds are the same; shutters are common house components and more familiar than the verb "shudder"; shutters can be closed when danger approaches, or may flap wildly in a storm; maybe the eggcorn means something like "shut down at the thought"
bled like a stuck pig	"bled like a stuffed pig"	This definition of "stuck" (stabbed with a knife) may be unfamiliar to non-farm-familiar students; "stuffed" is familiar as a descriptor of feeling full, or of Thanksgiving turkeys
pastime	"past time"	Unfamiliarity with the word "pastime"; idea of nostalgia associated with certain activities (fishing, baseball, etc.) that originated long ago
baking powder	"bacon powder"	The idea of a powder to help baked items rise may be unfamiliar; baking is more familiar as a verb/gerund than an adjective; "bacon powder" might be logically imagined as a bouillon-type additive; may reflect less awareness of traditionally domestic tasks
patent leather	"Patton leather"	"Patent" may be unfamiliar as an adjective; students may have heard of General George Patton and so associate the term with military gear; similar to the eggcorn "chester drawers" for chest of drawers
laptop	"labtop"	The portable computer as defined more by what it can do—i.e., its techno-scientific mini-laboratory character—than where it sits. As portability becomes standard it becomes less remarkable in the name
obscenity	"upsinity"	Obscene behavior might be interpreted as "sin rising up" (i.e., "up-sin-ity") in a person
for all intents and purposes	"for all intensive purposes"	The "and" is not fully articulated; "intensive" is a common adjective (e.g., intensive care); may be interpreted as "for all the important reasons"; similar to students mishearing "have" as "of" ("I would of come but I was grounded."), a mistake exacerbated by the common pronunciation of contractions such as "would've," "could've," and "should've"
per se	"per say"	The Latin of "per se" is unfamiliar, yet "per" is fairly common (miles per hour/gallon); might be interpreted as meaning what is literally "said" is not the full meaning
poor diet stunts growth	"poor diet stuns growth"	"Stunt" is more familiar as a noun; "stun" is a more common verb and makes sense as a partly paralyzing effect
a long spiel about rules	"a long spill about rules"	"Spill" is much more familiar than "spiel"; someone making a spiel might be figuratively "spilling out" many words

context (the same goes for grammar-checking programs). This makes them quite useful, but only to the extent that the user recognizes their arbitrary nature and corresponding limits. A computer does not know what word a writer intends; it can only make a suggestion based on its programming.

In these respects, such programs are quite similar to conventional grammar and spelling rules. Established conventions will be appropriate for many writing contexts, but at times alternative grammar and spelling may be just as appropriate, if not necessary. We want our students to be able to move beyond blind obedience to rules and an unquestioning use of tools toward a more critical and evaluative stance. Even when confronted by recommended changes from authorities (in this case in the form of a computer program), writers must ultimately make their own context-aware choices about spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Patricia J. McAlexander's article "Checking the Grammar Checker: Integrating Grammar Instruction with Writing"—which details a project leading students to consider both the benefits and drawbacks of a spell-checking program—argues that this kind of awareness can be developed through constructed classroom experiences. In a recent *English Journal* article, Reva Potter and Dorothy Fuller report that engaging high school students in discussions about grammar checkers may increase their confidence and understanding of grammar. Our discussions with students might ask them to extrapolate on this theme. Does a given set of rules apply in all circumstances? How do we know when it is appropriate to ignore a rule or a set of rules? Would we place our complete trust in a machine or a robot just because it's been programmed with the "correct" rules? These questions evoke larger issues of authority, obedience, morality, individuality, and the role of thinking people within systems. Crossover points for classic and contemporary texts are numerous: surely science fiction and Hollywood have suggested some of the problems involved in placing too much faith in technology.

Turning the Lens Inward: Pronunciation

Aside from adjusting our perspective about these kinds of errors and considering the practical possibilities with students, we might benefit from reflecting on our own frailties with language. Most English teachers I've known have found their way into the field through their love of reading and the written word. Where their students struggle with spelling, grammar, and making sense of unfamiliar words or phrases they've heard, it's my experience that avid readers have their own analogous weakness: attempting to successfully pronounce words they've only ever encountered in print. I suspect that all bookworms have a secret list of words whose definitions they understand but that present persistent problems rolling off the tongue, if we dare utter them at all.

For me, one of these troublesome words is *cumulative.* This is obviously not some esoteric or specialized term, yet I have to consciously force myself to pronounce this word with the correct stress on the first syllable. Unfortunately for me, it more often emerges as "ka-MYOOL-a-tiv," which has earned me my share of strange looks from colleagues. English teachers are naturally sensitive to such a faux pas (itself a term that most of us have stumbled over at some point, I'd bet). We're supposed to be the experts, after all, and yet all of us have been—and will be—exposed as human by our own tongue. Like eggcorns, many such pronunciation errors likely arise from logical-but-incorrect conclusions that have become stubbornly lodged in our minds despite our knowing better.

A closer look at my *cumulative* issues might reveal an interesting pattern. First, I've noticed a similar mistake in how I want to pronounce the word *sedentary* (that is, "se-DENT-a-ree" instead of the correct "SED-n-ter-ee"), and this gives me a clue as to common origins. I likely learned the meaning of both words during my early teen years, not through conversation but through encountering them in the books I read. By the time I tried out these words in my own speech, however, I'd probably over-generalized a mispronunciation from the structure of similar words. *Inquisitive, alternative, definitive, conservative*—all are similar in form to *cumulative,* but with the stress on the second syllable (and I was certainly familiar with the verb *accumulate,* which is similarly stressed). Meanwhile, other four-syllable words were creeping into my vocabulary, probably from fantasy and sci-fi novels—*leviathan, gargantuan, tyrannical.* In graduate school, my misspeaking of *cumulative* even jumped like a virus to a strange new word with an identical second syllable, *simulacrum* (which I proceeded to pronounce painfully as "sigh-MYOOL-a-crumb"). Regarding *sedentary,* I suspect

TEN ALTERNATIVES TO A TYPICAL DAILY ORAL LANGUAGE EXERCISE

1. **Construct a more interesting (i.e., more complex) sentence from a basic sentence.**
   Rather than an error-riddled example, students get a simple correct sentence and work to make it more detailed and engaging. (See Harry Noden's *Image Grammar,* Boynton/Cook, 1999.)

   Simple sentence: *Ryan looked at the dog.*

   Interesting sentence: *Ryan stared at the growling Rottweiler—its scarred jaws flecked with foam, its coat streaked with mud—and slowly, his eyes never leaving the animal, he eased himself backward as sweat began to prickle his skin.*
2. **Discuss contextual differences between similar statements with different registers.**
   Students articulate situations that might appropriately call for either sentence.

   Sentence A: *I am going to buy one of those boats.*

   Sentence B: *I'ma get me one of them boats.*
3. **Transform a sentence to make it appropriate to other contexts.**
   Students recast sentences according to specific contexts that they then must explain.

   Starter sentence: *You're fired.*

   Possible transformations:

   a. *We regret to inform you that your professional services are no longer required.*
   b. *Sorry, Bob, but with the poor economy we have to let you go.*
   c. *Get out now and don't come back!*
   d. *I'm breaking up with you.*
4. **Discuss a sentence that is technically correct but practically inappropriate.**
   Students consider "appropriateness" as a more useful criterion than "correctness."

   Teenager, invited to a party, knocks on the front door. A voice from inside calls out, "Who is it?" Teen replies, "It is I."
5. **Practice sentence combining.**
   Research suggests that sentence combining activities may help students develop more sophisticated structures in their writing. (See William Strong's *Sentence Combining: A Composing Book,* McGraw, 1994.)

   Stem sentences:

   a. The lawyer was in the courtroom.
   b. The lawyer turned.
   c. The turning movement was sudden.
   d. The lawyer pointed at the defendant.
   e. The lawyer shouted while pointing.
   f. The lawyer shouted that "this man is a murderer!"

   Possible sentence combination (among many):

   The lawyer turned suddenly in the courtroom, pointed at the defendant, and shouted, "This man is a murderer!"
6. **Conduct a sentence dictation activity.**
   Slowly read a sentence written by a published writer to students (preferably one with interesting punctuation choices). Students write down what they hear and attempt to punctuate the sentence as appropriately as possible. Follow-up discussion examines student choices, emphasizing the effect of different options. Possible mistakes—in both student and professional examples—are considered for their rhetorical impact.

   Example: *Wry and cranky, droll and cantankerous— that's the Mark Twain we think we know, thanks to reading "Huck Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" in high school.* (Rhoter)
7. **Examine and imitate the text from a product package or commercial website.**
   Many packages and commercial websites feature narrative, exposition, rhetorical flourishes, and creative sentence structure worth analyzing and imitating.

   Example (from a Lindor Truffles package): *Inspired by our secret recipe, our Master Chocolatiers have created a chocolate masterpiece: Lindor Truffles. This delicious Lindt Chocolate Shell enrobes an irresistibly smooth filling. Once you break its shell, the filling will start to melt, and so will you.*
8. **Examine a corporate slogan or brand that uses grammar/spelling in an interesting way.**
   Ask students to adopt the role of marketing analysts to explain or justify the use of "incorrect" grammar, spelling, and punctuation in advertising and branding.

   Examples: "We Do Chicken Right" (KFC), "Think Different" (Apple), Krispee Kreme Doughnuts
9. **Examine "folk etymologies," regional neologisms, and "backronyms," and perhaps create their own.**
   - Folk etymologies are seemingly logical but incorrect explanations (of which eggcorns are an example) that shift the origin and spelling of words or phrases: Asparagus becomes "sparrow grass," history ("his-story") yields the intentional "herstory" as a response.
   - Regional neologisms originate from local idiom: a *windalight* is a window that admits sunlight, a *mashtogo* is a standard-transmission car, and so on.
   - Backronyms are invented phrases to turn a word into an acronym, sometimes for humorous purposes: FORD (First On Race Days, *or* Fix Or Repair Daily), WIKI (What I Know Is), NAVY (Never Again Volunteer Yourself), etc.
10. **Examine real examples of passive voice for their audience impact, and consider other examples of how language can be used to obscure as well as to clarify.**
    Writers and speakers use passive voice and similar structures for genre-specific reasons (emphasizing events over identity) and for rhetorical purposes (such as avoiding fault, blame, or suspicion).

    Examples: Newspaper reports ("Two men were killed today in an apparent robbery"); Ronald Reagan on the Iran/Contra scandal ("Mistakes were made"); singer Chris Brown's carefully worded public statement following his arrest for assault ("Words cannot begin to express how sorry and sad I am for what transpired")

my mispronunciation was also reinforced from the stressed syllable in the earth science term *sedimentary* (and given how such rocks are formed, there was likely an eggcorn, or at least a malapropism, waiting to happen here as well). There are understandable reasons behind my goofy mistakes in stressed syllables, reasons that when brought out into daylight have the positive effect of demystifying how language learning (and mis-learning) sometimes happens. Frankly, I'm far less interested in learning the rule for stresses in four-syllable words with certain suffixes—is the solution really a DOL exercise addressing such a topic?—than I am in the way that individuals make logical and systematic language conclusions based on their unique experiences.

Language and Class

On a related note, Lisa Delpit has written about the powerful dynamics of race and class that often lurk beneath pronunciation, focusing in particular on how dominant Anglo norms of speech act within a self-reinforcing system to place certain students at fundamental disadvantages (24–26). A similar gate-keeping function likely underlies the use of certain words and phrases borrowed from other languages that sometimes operate as class-signifying emblems. It is one thing to know what *bon mot, deus ex machina,* and *sine qua non* mean, and quite another to demonstrate a verbal fluency with these and similar terms. How many of us—especially those of us without a classical education in French and Latin—are entirely comfortable uttering such terms, at least the first few times? The ability to correctly voice such language options has served historically to indicate a level of education available to a privileged few while not accidentally acting as a sifting mechanism to identify bourgeois and lower-class "pretenders" (perhaps most familiarly depicted in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* and its Broadway and film adaptation, *My Fair Lady*).

The relatively rare and fleeting discomfort I might experience in feeling uncultured or ignorant in my failure to accurately pronounce *l'enfant terrible* or *hegemony* or *oeuvre* or *Goethe* might offer a taste of what many students feel regularly as they struggle with everyday written language. When students write *very close veins* instead of *varicose veins* or *amplitheatre* instead of *amphitheatre,* a little transparency with our own language errors might go a long way in helping them grapple with their own.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Choosing the Best Verb: An Active and Passive Voice Minilesson" explores verb choice in a variety of online resources and then encourages students to draw conclusions about verb use. Students then explore the pieces they are writing, check for active and passive voice, and make necessary revisions. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/choosing-best-verb-active-280.html

Barbara A. Goodman

Linguistic Audacity: Shakespeare's Language and Student Writing

Goodman suggests studying Shakespeare's creative use of functional shift, spelling, and vocabulary to help students develop greater control of their own writing.

When teaching *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* many years ago to high school juniors at an international school, I took a great deal of time to explain many of the Americanisms as well as American geography that many of the students would not understand. We posted a large map of the Mississippi River and traced the journey of Huck and Jim. We reviewed the concepts of dialect and the use of language. For many of the students who had never been to the United States, but who hoped to attend American universities, studying American literature not only taught them about the great books of the States but also exposed them to American culture and American history. *Huckleberry Finn* is an extraordinarily potent novel to use in all of these situations. But in the class's discussions of the importance of the Mississippi in America's development, historic and current racism and racial tensions, American individualism and the West as a safety/escape valve, I missed discussing a simple vocabulary word: a word that made the entire novel make sense.

We had just reached the part in the novel when Jim has been locked up as a runaway slave and Tom and Huck are trying to help him escape. We had discussed the change in tone—and how some critics feel this part of the book was Twain's attempt to soften his message about American values—when a student raised her hand. She was a fluent English speaker from the Middle East. She had participated in discussions, done well on her quizzes and papers. When she raised her hand I assumed she had a question about the material we were covering on the book's ending; however, she asked the question I never expected. In all honesty and concern, she asked: "What's a raft?" It was the one word I had not explained—yet it is so basic to the text. Could you truly understand *Huckleberry Finn* without understanding what *raft* is? What had my student visualized about Huck's journey down the river before she asked me her question? I began to envision a fantasy meaning for *raft* that was far more elaborate than the actual meaning and that could change the whole context of Huck and Jim's trip.

Coinciding with that experience—during the same academic year—my first-year English class was covering vocabulary based on their assigned reading, and a student offered the following interpretation of one of our vocabulary words: a church congregation taking an apse after the sermon. The vocabulary word from the assigned reading was obviously *apse.* The definition looked up by student and provided from the dictionary was "a recess in a church." The student's usage, despite having done the homework, was flawed—because the student thought he knew the definition since he recognized the words in the definition, i.e., *recess* and *church.* The problem was the student defined *recess* as a play period or break after working, not a small alcove. Recess was what you had in elementary school after lunchtime. Given that definition, an apse after a rather long sermon made perfect sense.

Thus, twice within the same semester in two different classes I had encountered students doing their class work and engaging with texts, but not understanding context of the words they were reading. How then could I be sure, given these examples,

that my students truly did understand the basic vocabulary of the works we were reading? And if the students didn't realize they didn't understand the words, what did they think they were reading? What images did their imaginations create to match their perceptions of these words? Such questions continue to haunt me.

As I work with (or battle with) students about their usage, spelling, and vocabulary, I find myself thinking about Shakespeare's linguistic audacity. As we celebrate Shakespeare's boldness in language, can we help students be confident and bold in their language?

Certainly, of all the texts we teach in high school and college, Shakespeare's works can create the most constant battle with "rafts" and "apses," words that students don't recognize, but don't look up, or words that students think they recognize, but don't realize the words don't mean what they did in Shakespeare's times. Yet the language questions with Shakespeare go beyond vocabulary difficulties to the manner in which Shakespeare utilized (and played with) grammar, spelling, and structure.

Sometimes, as teachers we tend to ignore or avoid these language issues, discussing as I did with *Huckleberry Finn* the "big picture" (e.g., thematic issues and social contexts) and forgetting the basic but important value of the words themselves. Indeed, with Shakespeare, some teachers don't teach the text at all; to avoid the language, they choose to summarize the story and then have the students watch a movie. While Shakespeare should be experienced in performance, avoiding the issue of his words is avoiding one of the richest and most playful parts of Shakespeare. Engaging Shakespeare's language rather than ducking it can actually make for stimulating classroom discussions—and it also can help the students come to appreciate Shakespeare as a relevant, even radical, writer who disturbed the status quo and was not well-received by many of his colleagues. Students can begin to see Shakespeare for who he was, a man of linguistic audacity and daring, rather than someone to dread reading. Moreover, they may find that studying his language and linguistic audacity can give them more confidence when reading and studying other authors.

As we celebrate Shakespeare's boldness in language, can we help students be confident and bold in their language?

Functional Shifts

Functional shifts are one of Shakespeare's most common ways to create new words without confusing an audience's understanding. A word that is a noun is used as a verb, or a verb is used as an adjective, but no matter the shift, the meaning is understood because the word itself is not new—only its usage. When Lucio says, "Lord Angelo dukes it well in his absence" in act 3, scene 2, of *Measure for Measure,* he is not implying that Angelo is boxing; he is discussing how Angelo is managing his temporary rise to duke's status.[1] The creation of words through functional shifting may not seem important, but it is something our students are well familiar with. A recent example is the term *Google,* which underwent a functional shift to the verb "to google," which we use even when we are not using Google as a search engine. A word that can be successfully functionally shifted has to be a word that is familiar and accepted by the audience or its shift becomes awkward rather than compelling.

But familiarity does not always make a functional shift acceptable. Students may not always realize that language can be controversial—and functional shifts can cause great disagreements. A case in point is the word *contact,* which underwent a functional shift from noun to verb and then took on a new connotation in the 20th century. When *to contact* took on the meaning "to communicate with," the controversy began. The usage was believed to be too vague and was criticized by various linguists and language scholars, but the usage has continued and it is generally accepted and used by the public—which has caused the critics to become more accepting of its current usage.[2] Students also may not realize that not all languages allow functional shifts; in fact, English is one of the few. While we accept the noun *picnic* can become a verb *to picnic,* this process of functional shifting is extremely rare in other languages. Indeed, in the article "The Shakespeared Brain," Philip Davis discusses the way in which functional shifting as found in Shakespeare actually affects our brains.

After utilizing EEG tests, he draws the following conclusion: "[W]hile the Shakespearean functional shift was semantically integrated with ease, it triggered a syntactic re-evaluation process likely to raise attention. . . . Shakespeare is stretching us; he is opening up the possibility of further peaks, new potential pathways or developments" (Davis). Davis sees Shakespeare's language as lodging in the brain's pathways and then changing those pathways by developing new ones. Inventing games and challenges with Shakespeare's functional shifts would allow students to create new pathways while discovering how resourceful Shakespeare is. For students, this linguistic process can become a game—how many words can they discover that have undergone functional shifts? And then can they find other functional shifts in Shakespeare—and how many of those have become acceptable? Research, language, and controversy can make students more familiar with the way Shakespeare wrote and more aware of how he changed the language in ways we still use.

Spelling

Spelling in Shakespeare's day was what John Andrews, the editor of the Everyman edition of *Hamlet* and *Shakespeare Quarterly,* called "unanchored": "Andrews means more slippery, free-floating, not just in word-letter formations but in meaning" (Rosenbaum 252). This flexibility in spelling allowed for overlapping connotations of words. Thus, as Ron Rosenbaum points out, when original spelling is used, the debate about Hamlet's soliloquy and whether it is "solid," "sullied," or "sallied" flesh is not an issue, as it is when using modernized spelling: "*each* spelling gives one *all three* overlapping colorations of the word" (252; italics in original). In other words, in Shakespeare's time any one of the spellings would give all three words' meanings and connotations. Picking one word in a modern edition, unfortunately, does not allow the breadth of meaning that was found in Shakespeare's original script—whatever the spelling.

To engage them in this language complexity, students could be given some of the overlapping spellings in contemporary English, such as "our" and "are," as with the question: "Who is coming to are house?" Or "could've" and "could of," as with the statement "I could of been a contender." These common spelling errors come from similar pronunciations and illustrate the debate with "solid," "sullied," and "sallied" flesh. But could these common errors be used further to discuss how the change in spelling (but not pronunciation) can change meaning?

Students may not realize that they are not reading Shakespeare's language in the original—especially with regard to spelling. They are not able to explore his spellings' meanings because the spellings have been changed to meet modern specifications. Editors have conflated and/or parsed Shakespeare's language to fit their own perspectives on Shakespeare's meaning. Since students often feel resentment at the editing of their papers by peers and teachers, they should easily be able to understand the controversy around those "experts" who have decided what makes Shakespeare work best. Students can be introduced to the arguments about the words Shakespeare used and examine the same scene but with differing spelling renditions—perhaps even performing some of the scenes or speeches—to see how the words' spellings change the speaking and thus the meaning.

For example, how is the meaning enhanced if you read Macbeth's soliloquy as it was originally written: "To morrow and to morrow and to morrow"? As Rosenbaum points out, morrow becomes not just a time, but also a location to which one travels or "creeps" (253). Students should try speaking the line both ways to experience how the spelling changes its significance. Also, various film versions of the scenes using the different words and pronunciations could be viewed and analyzed for their effectiveness. By performance or observation, students can become involved with the question of spelling and even debate which spellings work most effectively—or which is closest to Shakespeare's intention. Research, reading, and linguistic controversy can relate directly to students' experiences with spelling and context.

Picking one word in a modern edition, unfortunately, does not allow the breadth of meaning that was found in Shakespeare's original script—whatever the spelling.

Vocabulary

Shakespeare is often noted for his vocabulary. In Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable's fifth edition of *A History of the English Language,* it states, "It is a well-known fact that, except for a man like the Elizabethan translator, Philemon Holland, Shakespeare had the largest vocabulary of any English writer" (233). Estimates vary on the exact number of words Shakespeare created and used, ranging from fewer than 20,000 to more than 30,000 words (Crystal 316). Students should identify with Shakespeare in this regard, as they too create new words to fit their needs. Students add prefixes to "disinclude" people instead of exclude them, and they "conversate" with one another rather than converse. These creations (examples from student discussions in class and overheard on the street) may not be accepted by teachers, but the questioning and rejection of new words didn't stop Shakespeare either. He, for example, seems to be fond of the prefix "out" with words such as "out-Herod, outfrown, outpray" (qtd. in Crystal 322); words such as these may not be used in modern English but their meanings are as easily understood as my students' invented words *disinclude* and *conversate.* Some of the words Shakespeare created and used, such as "anthropophaginian" and "exsufflicate" (qtd. in Crystal 322), are not easy to understand and have fully disappeared from usage.

I am advocating we approach Shakespeare as descriptive grammarians who see the language and observe its effects. In this manner, you can also see and observe the students' language and draw parallels if they functionally shift a word or utilize homonyms to give a sentence layered meanings.

Shakespeare's ability to create words led some other writers and those in power during his time to disdain his language and call him (and others like him) an "inkhorn." The creation of new words through borrowing and classical language was seen by these critics as affectation. "Some considered the use of learned words mere pedantry and tried to drive them out by ridicule, calling them 'inkhorn' terms" (Baugh and Cable 218). Students might enjoy reading such criticisms of Shakespeare; especially as he is often held up now as the epitome of great writing, students may find it ironic to discover how many have condemned him and his language throughout the centuries. Shakespeare himself never seemed concerned with these criticisms and continued his own approach to language. When he introduced new words, he used means such as doubling or definitions to clarify the words' meanings. Thus we find in Macbeth's famous lines after killing Duncan about the blood on his hands:

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand? No, this my hand with rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red. (2.2.64–67)

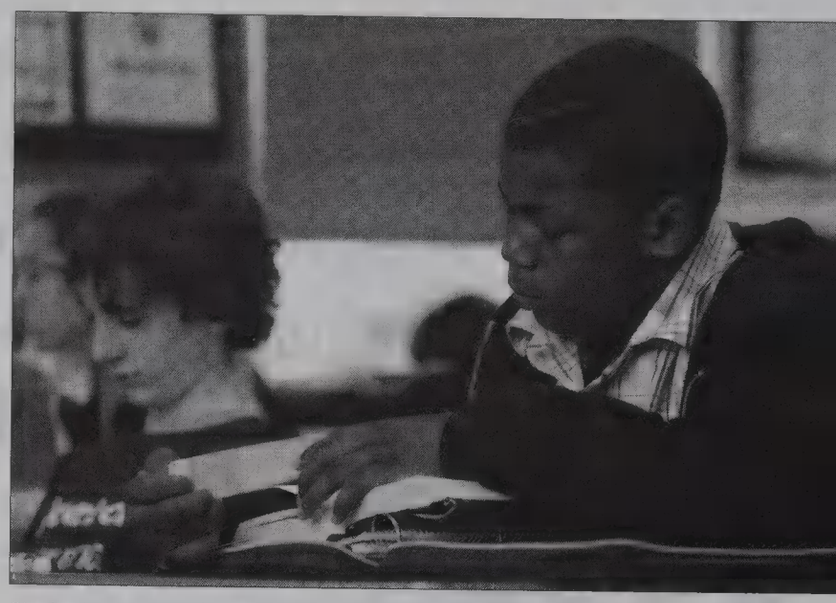
In such a manner Shakespeare clearly defines *incarnadine* by pairing it with red, leaving no doubt of the word's meaning.[3]

Encouraging Control in Student Writing

Prescriptive grammarians may think I am advocating that we ignore students' writing problems and instead celebrate their mistakes as creativity and daring. This is not my argument. Rather, I am advocating we approach Shakespeare as descriptive grammarians who see the language and observe its effects. In this manner, you can also see and observe the students' language and draw parallels if they functionally shift a word or utilize homonyms to give a sentence layered meanings. Show students in Shakespeare how such linguistic daring gave his texts greater depth. But also discuss how Shakespeare made his choices deliberately (as demonstrated by his use of doubling to define words) and that to make one's language truly bold, a writer has to be in control—making choices and not leaving effect to chance. Similarly, I am not advocating we ignore Shakespeare's themes and social context, but so often those themes and social contexts are cloaked in his most effective language—so they cannot be separated.

Certainly, many other parts of Shakespeare's language could be examined besides the areas I briefly mentioned: dialects, idioms, punctuation all allow for playful exploration. While it may not be possible in class to delve into all of these areas of language, choosing one area and developing an approach that allows students to use their own linguistic audacity as a means of exploring Shakespeare's daring can make them come to appreciate their own abilities, Shakespeare's radical approach, and the English language's overall uniqueness. While functional shifting, spelling, and vocabulary

are celebrated as part of Shakespeare's genius, it would be fun for students to investigate how many words in a particular scene he created, how many of those words still exist, and if their meanings have changed at all. Ignoring Shakespeare's linguistic risk-taking can give students a false sense of their own language—seeing it as something stultifying and constrained, rather than open and elastic. As students learn that language is not static but rather flexible, they can begin to see how their English habits are part of the same larger picture that Shakespeare's English is.



Students can use Shakespeare's creativity with language to develop more control of their own writing. (Thompson-McClellan Photography)

Notes

1. Other examples of functional shifts from Shakespeare are "Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds," *Romeo and Juliet,* 3, 5, 152; and "a hand that kings have lipped," *Antony and Cleopatra,* 2, 5, 30. Similar examples can be found in most other plays.

2. The *American Heritage Dictionary*'s usage panel's opinion on "contact" demonstrates this shift. In 1969 only 34% accepted the usage of *to contact* as a verb meaning "to communicate with," while more recently in the usage panel of the 2010 edition it states that 65% accepted it.

3. As I mentioned when discussing my student's use of *apse,* sometimes students think they know a word's meaning when they don't. For example, today a husband's buxom wife is well-built, but a Renaissance man's buxom wife was obedient. In both cases, a husband may "brag" about his wife being buxom—but his meaning is totally different. This misunderstanding can happen today. For example, *fat* (or *phat*) can mean something different than obese, and today's students reading the work *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay* are confused because they do not realize that *gay* had a different meaning when the work was written.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Constructing New Understanding through Choral Readings of Shakespeare" students explore theme and character by working in small groups to compose a 50-line choral reading made by cutting and rearranging lines from the play. They then choreograph, rehearse, and perform the choral reading for the class. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/constructing-understanding-through-choral-1121.html

NCTE Literacy Education Advocacy Day 2011: April 28

Join NCTE members from across the nation for NCTE's Literacy Education Advocacy Day on Thursday, April 28, 2011. NCTE members attending Advocacy Day will learn the latest about literacy education issues at the federal level and have a chance to interact with people highly involved with those issues. See http://www.ncte.org/action/advocacyday for details.

John W. White

De-centering English: Highlighting the Dynamic Nature of the English Language to Promote the Teaching of Code-Switching

White describes classroom activities that help de-center students' views of English as a static discursive norm and demonstrate the inherent power in different forms of "English."

"When students enter *my* English class, they should leave their 'cultural hats' at the door. In my classes, I'm going to require that students speak and use *proper* English. Period." This was the reaction of one of my English language arts methods students while we were discussing the role of students' native and culturally imbued discursive practices in schools (in other words, high school students' liberal use of Ebonics/African American Vernacular English and popular-culture-induced slang). Her views were far from unique. Nods of agreement showed that this opinion was shared by many of her peers. My lesson on making use of the dynamic nature of English and the many forms it takes across and within cultures certainly wasn't going as planned.

My lesson goal had been to get the students to see that though we should teach the conventions of Standard English, we should also acknowledge and even celebrate the unique and highly effective forms of discourse that students bring with them into the classroom. I was proposing that not only does a broader view of what counts as appropriate classroom discourse promote an inclusive English classroom, it creates a culturally responsive and inclusive foundation from which to teach students code-switching to Standard English, the use of which is an essential part of what Lisa Delpit has called the "codes of power." We can, I argued, use students' native "ways with words" (Heath) as starting points from which to teach them how to use Standard English. Instead of viewing our K–12 students' respective language usage as deficits that we should squelch, we could value these unique discursive forms, use them for code-switching purposes, and thus better induce students to add Standard English "to their existing [language] repertoire" (Kutz 85).

However, my students (and many other preservice teachers), who were only weeks away from their student teaching semester, had a narrow—and I posit an ethnocentric—view of what counts as appropriate language practices in the classroom. They saw "English" as a rigidly defined set of unchanging norms and their role as English teachers to be language police. Their views mirrored both the hyperbolic rhetoric of opponents to Oakland's infamous attempt to acknowledge "Black Vernacular English" in schools in the 1990s (see Gayles and Denerville) and, more recently, proponents of Arizona's new controversial immigration laws. More importantly, my students held views that could, when put into classroom practice, silence and alienate the students whom they most need to engage in their English classes: those who speak non-Standard English dialects.

These fears prompted me to attempt something to "de-center" my students' sense of English and, in so doing, to highlight the inherent value in numerous forms of English communication. I created—and have subsequently employed in my methods classes—what seem to be effective means of de-centering students' views of English as a static discursive norm and code-switching activities that demonstrate the inherent power in different forms of

"English." Below I present these lessons and briefly discuss their impact on my students' thinking.

English Teachers as English Police: Language as Static

In my English language arts methods class, one preservice teacher said that a primary part of teaching English is to teach the "rules" of the English language and to enforce those rules so that future students would learn that English rules stay the same and that people need to follow them "to be successful in our country." (The use of "our country" is telling; it suggests a cultural/linguistic norm based on white, Western linguistic codes of power.) Though this preservice teacher was no doubt well-intentioned, the attitude expressed does not correspond with more contemporary views of language and literacy. This view ignores the fact that language is socially mediated; we use and re-create language to meet our social and cultural needs (Fairclough; Gee; Lave and Wenger; Street; Wertsch). Correspondingly, as cultures change, languages change. Thus, our lexicon is always growing and changing; we add new words constantly while words whose contexts are no longer valid die a quiet death. For example, at the same time terms such as *voice mail, digitize,* and *microwave* have become common, words such as *icebox* and *forsooth* and even *motorcar* have largely disappeared from the English lexicon. A language with by far the largest number of words of any language, English is constantly changing and adapting to the needs of our society. This student's views also ignore research that suggests that simply discounting or ignoring the power of students' culturally imbued discursive styles in the classroom setting silences them and pushes them further away from the English curricula we are trying to teach (White, 2007, "Resistance," "Sociolinguistic").

To emphasize the ever-changing nature of English, my students engage in an activity in which they read, interpret, and then answer questions about two canonical pieces of English literature: *Beowulf* and *Canterbury Tales* (see fig. 1). The questions associated with these two texts are similar to those that high school students might encounter when reading texts in their own English classrooms (answering questions about the plot, character, themes, inferred meanings, and specific questions about details designed to require close textual reading).

Seldom are students—individually, in groups, or as a whole class—able to make much sense of the first text or answer the corresponding questions (though some use the obvious context clue "Beowulf" in the text and remember reading translated versions of the text in high school classes). Most often, students simply give up on trying to answer the *Beowulf* questions. They shrug their shoulders or look away in response to my questions. When they do respond to my repeated inquiries, they often claim that the text is "impossible" because it is, as a student said, "not in English."

These same students have mixed success with answering the *Canterbury Tales* questions. College English majors and minors (who make up my course) tend to be more familiar with this canonical text (usually from modern English translations) and thus have more prior knowledge upon which to build. They are also generally able to interpret the Middle English sufficiently to answer these relatively simple questions. Nonetheless, there is a high degree of variance in students' ability to answer these questions and the levels of frustration they have in so doing. Such variance speaks again to prior knowledge and to their familiarity with the language used within the text. Their ability to engage with the text is highly dependent on their ability to code-switch between the Standard English of today and the English of 600 years ago.

To emphasize the ever-changing nature of English, my students engage in an activity in which they read, interpret, and then answer questions about two canonical pieces of English literature: *Beowulf* and *Canterbury Tales.*

More importantly for the purposes of this assignment, my students must then try to recite the original pieces as accurately as possible. Reciting *Beowulf* aloud and with accuracy (to Old English norms) is almost impossible. Thus, most students simply give up or make up pronunciations. However, it *is* possible to recite *Canterbury Tales* if one has knowledge of the oral language conventions of Middle English (something most undergraduate students do not possess). When student volunteers recite this passage, I frequently stop their reading to correct their pronunciations and emphasize their English language "deficits" (note the phonetic version of the passage in fig. 1). My intent with this

FIGURE 1. Questions on Two Canonical Pieces of English Literature

Beowulf
(Old English, 750–1000 AD)

1. HWÆT, WE GAR-DEna in geardagum,
2. þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,
3. hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon!
4. oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
5. monegum mægþum meodosetlaofteah,
6. egsode eorlas, syþþanærest wearð
7. feasceaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad,
8. weox under wolcnum weorðmyndum þah,
9. oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsittendra
10. ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
11. gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning!
12. Ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned
13. geong in geardum, þone God sende
14. folce to frofre; fyrenðearfe ongeat,
15. þe hie ær drugon aldorlease
16. lange hwile; him þæs Liffrea,
17. wuldres Wealdend woroldare forgeaf,
18. Beowulf wæs breme—blæd wide sprang—
19. Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in.
20. Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean,
21. fromum feohgiftumon fæder bearme,

Text Questions

1. Who is the main protagonist of the story?
2. From whom does the protagonist come?
3. In what kingdom does the story take place?
4. What is the role of orphans in the story?
5. Why was the king so respected?

Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer
(Middle English, late 14th century)

1. Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
2. The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
3. And bathed every veyne in swich licour
4. Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
5. Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
6. Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
6. Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
8. Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
9. And smale foweles maken melodye,
10. That slepen al the nyght with open ye
11. (so priketh hem nature in hir corages);
12. Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages

Canterbury Tales, Phonetic Version

1. Whan that Avril with his shoorez sote-eh
2. The druughth of March hath persèd toe the rote-eh,
3. And baathèd every vein in switch licoor
4. Of which vertúe engendrèd is the flure,
5. Whan Zephirus ache with his swayt-eh braith,
6. Inspeerèd hath in every holt and haith
7. The tender croppez, and the yung-eh sun-eh
8. Hath in the Ram his hal-f coorse y-run-eh,
9. And smaaleh foolez maaken melody-eh
10. That slaipen al the nicked with awpen ee-eh
11. So pricketh hem Nat-yóor in hir cooráhjez—
12. Than longen fol-k to gawn on pilgrimahjez

(Murphy, vii)

Text Questions

1. What is the season and why is this important to the story?
2. Who is Zephirus and why is this important to the story?
3. What do people wish to do in this season?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of the passage?
5. What is the tone of the passage (examples)?

part of the activity is to act as the Middle English police, insisting that each reader speak in the "standard" form. While correcting students' many flawed pronunciations, I remind them—generally in a lighthearted manner—that *Canterbury Tales* was written in relatively standard English and is part of the traditional curricular canon (things with which they should be intimately familiar).

Students who are native English speakers and who tend to hold a static view of English can see—and more importantly experience—how English is an ever-changing language and they can feel, albeit in a nonthreatening way, linguistic alienation within the English classroom. In short, the activities and readings demonstrate that English itself changes per the needs and uses of those who use it and that familiarity and practice with discursive styles affects one's ability to understand and use it.

Tupac: Lost in Translation

Most college-aged students have some understanding of the concept of "lost in translation." Frequently, they equate the term with differences in world languages, such as the confusion that results when non-English speakers encounter idioms in English. Students who have significant experience studying a foreign language or who grew up speak-

ing a language other than English tend to grasp the concept even more fully; they can describe how concepts or words in one language do not correspond with specific English counterparts (Spanish speakers can certainly understand why the Chevy *Nova* had to be renamed to sell in Spanish-speaking nations). However, few students tend to see the idea of "lost in translation" as it occurs *within a language.* They generally fail to see the dynamic nature of dialects and discourses within modern American English and how such dialects are uniquely positioned to express ideas and feelings (and conversely, how the power of ideas can be lost in translation when expressed in a standard form of English). To highlight the power inherent in specific non-Standard English discursive forms, I have my students translate a pop-culture-based passage into "Standard English." The students take a section of Tupac Shakur's "Just Me Against the World" and create their own translation; Figure 2 is a class sample.

Once students have completed the activity we share our translations, examine respective versions of the passage, and discuss (or vote on) which one holds the most power to move the audience. Though each passage—the original and its translation—says the same thing (each has the same literal message), the original, non-Standard English passage inevitably holds far more emotional and rhetorical power regardless of audience. Shakur's original version speaks loudest both to its intended audience (young, urban youth) as well as to the predominantly middle- and upper-middle-class white students in my methods courses. When discussing our different translations, students last semester said, "Ours just seems so, so . . ." "White," chimed in a peer, adding, "It's like the language he [the professor] would use." A third student described the translation in the figure as "It's like, antiseptic, boring." Via different translations of the same text, my students experienced firsthand how meaning can be lost when we insist on a rigid form of English for making meaning.

To further highlight the effect of culturally imbued language styles on meaning, students are encouraged to do an activity I used while teaching poetry and code-switching to urban high school English students: (1) translate their favorite songs into Standard English; (2) translate more "traditional" and canonical poetry, such as selected works of Emily Dickinson, into hip-hop versions; (3) create a dialogue using a Creole/Cajun lexicon. Through such activities students engage in active code-switching to different discourses and, by doing so, make cultural connections to language usage. Just as importantly, they are forced to attempt using language forms with which they are generally not proficient or comfortable. Such linguistic alienation is, I try to highlight, what many non-Standard English speakers feel in our classrooms.

FIGURE 2. Standard English Translation of Tupac Shakur's *Just Me Against the World* (Classroom Sample)

Can you understand what I see as my future?

I live in a stressful city; the police keep an eye out for me

The housing projects are a violent place, people are being hurt and killed

But I can't leave behind this life,

I stay busy making money.

The witnessing of murders and seeing dead bodies in abandoned buildings

Negatively influences children, causing them to have a skewed view of life

They become addicted to the violence and from the sounds of gunfire,

A sound they don't even stop to think about, but will they survive or fall prey to this same violence?

Not even aware

Maybe death is the only way he'll understand—but it's too late

Because others are still dying—I'm losing my good friends quickly

They're being buried in cemeteries

I worry about this a lot, so much so I can't see a future

I wonder, will I live? I really don't have anyone who loves me

I am headed for danger, I can't trust people

I load my gun when I feel this terrible anger

I don't want to make excuses, because this is my reality

Complaining doesn't do any good; no one notices the problem with our youth unless there's gunfire

I'm all alone in my quest for recognition of the problem.

Standard English Just Makes the Most Sense: Heidegger on Truth

While describing his feelings about different discourse norms in the classroom, one of the future English teachers said, "Using Standard English is important because, if for nothing else, it makes more sense [than other forms]. It is something that we all can understand." Figure 3 is meant to complicate the notion that Standard English is inherently more sensible or comprehensible than other forms. The passage itself, from Martin Heidegger's *Poetry, Language, Thought,* is written in Standard English. Moreover, it is also a relatively simple text in form: it rates a 10.6 grade level on the Flesch-Kincaid readability measurement. Ironically, interpreting this passage proves exceptionally difficult for virtually all of my students.

Students working on this passage, either in groups or as a whole class, spend inordinate amounts of time trying to decode it to come up with a meaning that makes sense to them. After much struggle and what even they agree is far too much "time on task" with this relatively short passage, they come up with a number of possible definitions. Sometimes they come close to an effective definition (based on professional philosophers' interpretations). Just as often, their interpretations are far from Heidegger's intent.

More important, students simply give up on trying to understand the passage. Said one student recently, "It gives me a headache just trying to figure it out . . . it's like the author is trying to make the concept impossible to understand *by the way he has written it*" (emphasis added). What this student expressed mirrors what many struggling readers and non-Standard English speaking students say about the texts we use in our high school English classes. Standard English is relative; one's ability to understand a text—even a text with simple vocabulary and construction—is dependent on one's linguistic standards. Philosophers understand Heidegger because they have learned to read, speak, and think in specific ways; they have learned to code-switch between everyday discursive practices and those they need for success within their field. Ironically, this student had the right idea; philosophers do sometimes use obtuse language to get readers to wrestle both with the text and with the ideas inherent in them. They know that uses of language have an effect on the meaning one takes from a text (or a discursive event).

"To Boldly Go" Is Simply Better Than "To Go Boldly"

Many will remember the famous tag line (above) from the opening of the 1960s television series *Star Trek.* Few, however, recognize that teachers and grammar purists for decades decried the use of such split infinitives; they saw such statements as "to boldly go where no man has gone before" as, if not grammatically incorrect, a poor stylistic choice. Some English teachers for years assumed that theirs

FIGURE 3. *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Modern English)

Truth is un-truth insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the un-uncovered, in the sense of concealment. In unconcealedness, as truth, there occurs also the other "un-"of a double restraint or refusal. Truth occurs as such in the opposition of clearing and double-concealing. Truth is the primal conflict in which, always in some particular way, the Open is won within which everything stands and from which everything withholds itself that shows itself and withdraws itself as a being. Whenever and however this conflict breaks out and happens, the opponents, lighting or clearing and concealing, move apart because of it. Thus the Open of the place of conflict is won. The openness of this Open, that is, truth, can be what it is, namely *this* openness, only if and as long as it establishes itself within this Open. Hence there must always be some being in this Open, something that is, in which the openness takes its stand and against its constancy. In taking possession thus of the Open, the openness holds open the Open and sustains it. Setting and taking possession are here everywhere drawn from the Greek sense of *thesis,* which means a setting up in the unconcealed.

—Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (60–61)

Based on this text—written in Standard English at a tenth-grade readability level (Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score: 10.6)—answer the following questions:

1. What is Heidegger's thesis?
2. Briefly describe how Heidegger describes the nature of truth.
3. Rephrase the first few sentences into your own words.

was the job to protect English grammar from the changes wrought upon it from non-academic influences. They saw common usage as an enemy to good grammar. However, that most people today fail to pay much attention to split infinitives demonstrates the importance of conveying an idea over arcane rules. "To boldly go where no man has gone before" is perfectly clear (though gendered). Ironically, it might be—at least in part—due to its minor deviation in grammatical style (adhering instead to a more commonly used form of English) that this pop-culture catchphrase has so much staying power; it helps hook the average viewer with the greater message of the show.

Though many English teachers, grammarians, and lexicographers (in other words, language purists) may lament the fact, English is an ever-changing and dynamic language. Its norms, though somewhat stable, are also amenable to the changes of the society in which they are used. Our lexicon is always growing to account for the exponential growth in knowledge corresponding with the electronic age. Similarly, we use language for different purposes within a given society. We change the way we use language depending on the context in which we find ourselves (in other words, we consciously and unconsciously code-switch frequently throughout the average day). Because English is a dynamic language, we must reconceptualize our role as English teachers. To fully engage students (split infinitive intended), we should not adhere to an anachronistic and static view of English. Instead, we must acknowledge, accept, and even use different language forms within the classroom to make that classroom dynamic, inclusive, and relevant to students' lives.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"An Introduction to *Beowulf:* Language and Poetics" provides an introduction to the language and poetics of the epic poem. Although this lesson assumes students will read *Beowulf* in translation, it introduces students to the poem's original Old English and explains the relationship between Old, Middle, and Modern English. Students are introduced to the five characters in the Old English alphabet that are no longer used in Modern English. Students translate a short, simple phrase from Old English; listen to a passage from the poem being read in Old English; and study important literary devices. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/introduction-beowulf-language-poetics-813.html

Melissa W. Noel

A Cold Manipulation of Language

A high school teacher shows how close examination of the language in Truman Capote's* In Cold Blood *can help students develop greater awareness of authors' intentions and how writers use their language choices to influence readers.

English language fascinates and inspires some of us. Through close examination we learn about the subtle changes and nuances of language—those alterations that authors make to elicit a compelling response from a reader throughout a lengthy text, say, a book or novel. Sophisticated readers recognize the tone shifts, the waves of emotions, the power of the language. Some students, however, see a monotone, flat line similar to an EKG of a corpse.

Textbooks and grammar worksheets do not adequately convey to students how readers or listeners are shaped by the language of the writer. The best way to help students understand the emphasis of a dash or another device is to see one used during a suspenseful moment in a dramatic selection. It is up to the teacher to select dramatic works that generate internal conflicts for students, because those literary selections will make them sit up and pay attention to the language that is in front of them. Once they are aware of their physical responses, most readers will note the language and yearn to figure out the ultimate question: "How did the author do that?"

A useful text to illustrate that authors control language for an audience is *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote, so I always start my AP English Language and Composition course with that text. Activities that teach tone, diction, and syntax are used throughout my Capote unit to help the students understand and master concepts that might be poorly understood. I introduce the Aristotelian model of rhetoric (audience—subject—speaker) with this book, as Capote carries the students through his real (or invented) personal saga with Perry Smith and Dick Hickock. Students appreciate the complications that *In Cold Blood* presents, and they enjoy examining the language that Capote uses to change readers' perceptions of the events as he takes them through an account of the true story. One thing is always guaranteed during this unit: no one falls asleep!

Teaching Nonfiction and *In Cold Blood*

With nonfiction, especially imaginative nonfiction, such as Capote's *In Cold Blood,* the question of "What is the author's purpose?" can be challenging. Maybe there is a global or local message to convey as in *Fast Food Nation.* Perhaps the author wants to prompt an action or generate a movement such as Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery.* Or, as in Capote's case, perhaps the writer has so many agendas that the discussion of intentions is endless.

Truman Capote wanted to break away from fiction to awaken the world to a new genre by melding imaginative writing with journalistic reporting, so he wrote a nonfiction book—with a little flair. With his friend Harper Lee, he investigated the true account of the murder of Herbert Clutter's family in Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959. Capote befriended the family, friends, and killers of the Clutter family to tell this horrific story. He presents the events chronologically with his "unnamed narrator" revealing everything from a "detached" viewpoint; however, it becomes apparent in Part II that the killers, or "Persons Unknown," are shown some sympathy by the author. Frequently he presents one murderer, Perry Smith, as a victim instead of a

killer. The murder is quickly detailed in Part I and forgotten as the killers are described and followed on their trek across the country in a failed attempt to escape capture. The author gradually shows Smith's handicaps and then begins detailing his past; before readers realize what is happening, they find themselves feeling some sympathy for this cold killer. Capote's manipulation is gradual, but every reader recognizes it by the time he reaches Part II.

I do not warn students that this shift in perspective is coming. In fact, I enjoy watching them discover it on their own, because it is the best example I know of an author's deliberate manipulation of an audience. When students realize that Capote is showing kindness toward Smith, they are surprised, just as everyone else was when the book was released after Smith's and Hickock's executions. Without any encouragement from me, students ask, "Why did Capote do this? He just showed us the details of the murders in Part I." That curiosity is a springboard for a discussion into HOW? *How did* Capote manipulate the reader to feel kindness toward Smith? This natural progression of curiosity—thanks to Capote—provides me an opportunity to show students how language can be controlled for a specific purpose.

Lessons to Get There

Through questioning and Socratic seminars, students arrive at the conclusion that Capote feels sorry for Smith because he connects to him on some level. In Chapter 1, Capote's presentation is a good example of an author who starts by carrying readers down one path (presenting the Clutters as an ordinary country family before and during a horrible death) only to reroute the reader to a different path (presenting one killer as a benign, abused boy-like man with mental and physical handicaps). Capote leaves Dick Hickock, a cruel brute, out there to take the fall for the murders, only to shock the reader later (spoiler alert) with the revelation that it was Perry, the child-man for whom we felt some sympathy and understanding, who murdered the Clutters "in cold blood." When students are put in a circle and asked to discuss the events of the story in a Socratic style, they arrive at some of these conclusions without my aid, and those conclusions are more powerful than a worksheet or lecture.

Capote's ultimate purposes for writing *In Cold Blood* can be discussed for days. What was Capote's true purpose in presenting Smith as a damaged child? Did he connect to Smith and feel sympathy for him? Did Capote want to toy with an audience, or was he presenting his real conflicted feelings? Did Capote want to create a new genre?

Students often argue that Capote wants readers to understand Smith. Some will research and support the notion that he felt romantically attached to Perry Smith. Claims such as these must be proven through evidence in the text, and that takes a lot of work on the student's part. The ending of the book suggests another purpose as the narrator attends the execution and blatantly opposes the action to make a clear political statement against the death penalty. By the time my students reach the end of the book, everyone agrees that Capote had an agenda far beyond detailing the events of a murder in Holcomb, Kansas. Of that, we can be certain.

When students realize that Capote is showing kindness toward Smith, they are surprised, just as everyone else was when the book was released after Smith's and Hickock's executions.

While reading the book, I incorporate lessons to highlight tone, diction, syntax, attitude, and style to explain rhetoric since these are the tools that create the manipulation of language (see examples in the next section). My primary objective is to teach my audience how these fundamental devices can enable them, as writers, to have a desired effect on their own audiences. Students need to understand audience and what their readers demand, but they also need to understand how diction and syntax can alter the tone of a paragraph; I also want them to recognize that the tone can shift and change throughout a selection—just as it does in *In Cold Blood.*

Since *In Cold Blood* walks the line between fiction and nonfiction, it makes an excellent study for a class that wants to discuss "purpose" and "audience," as the author deliberately takes readers where Capote wants them to go—into the mind of Perry Smith, a man that he possibly cared for more than we want to know about. He confuses readers as he relates affection for Smith, aversion to Hickock, and indifference for the family. This makes the

students ask, without prompting, "What is this author doing?" They read along with the text and recognize the nuances of the language while examining the passages. Capote said in an interview in the *New York Times,* "in the nonfiction novel [one] can also manipulate: if I put something in which I don't agree about I can always set it in a context of qualification without having to step into the story myself to set the reader straight" (qtd. in Plimpton). My class can follow the chronology of the events and the way the tone shifts to trace how the "narrator" changes his opinions about the people involved in the case as he continues his investigation. This shift is obvious in the tone and style of Capote's writing. The study of this book enables a class to examine an author's use of language—not only so the students can understand his methods, but so they can understand the power of these tools for their own writing. Students practice writing passages in which they alter the tone for a specific audience and shift that tone within a single work. Finally, they start to recognize the depth of language a little bit more.

FIGURE 1. Comparing Capote's Writing Styles

Excerpt from Capote's "A Christmas Memory":

> A woman with shorn white hair is standing at the kitchen window. She is wearing tennis shoes and a shapeless gray sweater over a summery calico dress. She is small and sprightly, like a bantam hen; but, due to a long youthful illness, her shoulders are pitifully hunched. Her face is remarkable—not unlike Lincoln's, craggy like that, and tinted by sun and wind; but it is delicate too, finely boned, and her eyes are sherry-colored and timid. "Oh my," she exclaims, her breath smoking the windowpane, "it's fruitcake weather!" (n.p.)

A description of Herbert Clutter from *In Cold Blood*:

> As an educated man successful in his profession, as an eminent Republican and church leader—even though of the Methodist church—Mr. Clutter was entitled to rank among the local patricians, but just as he had never joined the Garden City Country Club, he had never sought to associate with the reigning coterie. Quite the contrary, for their pleasures were not his; he had no use for card games, golf, cocktails, or buffet suppers served at ten—or, indeed, for any pastime that he felt did not "accomplish something." (34)

Highlighting Authorial Choices

First published in 1956, one of Capote's short stories, "A Christmas Memory," serves as a nice comparison/contrast piece for *In Cold Blood* when analyzing tone as a rhetorical device (see fig. 1). At least part of Capote's intent with his descriptions is to create verisimilitude that encourages readers to visualize the characters. In his fiction and in *In Cold Blood,* he details the people he wanted the readers to see. However, the paragraph about the eccentric old aunt in "A Christmas Memory" is different from the description of Herbert Clutter in the more journalistic account (however blighted) of *In Cold Blood.* Both are vivid portrayals, but the description of Buddy's aunt includes more adjectives and different syntax. Inserted commas for the aunt allow the author to add more color; the dashes in the second selection from *In Cold Blood* allow him to add more details. "Decisions about formal and informal language, the use of narrative or quotations, the tone of familiarity or objectivity" are important aspects of rhetoric that go beyond lessons on grammar (Roskelly 9). The students get to observe how a writer uses punctuation correctly as a tool to change the tone. After looking at the punctuation, the class can examine the diction, syntax, and tone, all leading to the author's purpose for each piece of literature.

The study of this book enables a class to examine an author's use of language—not only so the students can understand his methods, but so they can understand the power of these tools for their own writing.

Comparing and contrasting samples of *In Cold Blood* to other works by Capote helps students see how his intentions vary as he switches from fiction to nonfiction. The style of both varies just enough to generate a good discussion about tone and attitude because the short story is more saccharine than anything in *In Cold Blood,* except, perhaps, the description of Nancy Clutter. The voice is far more detached in the second selection, and the diction is less expressive. The syntax, too, is less complex. The clauses differ enough to generate discussion. Students are able to deduce the reasons behind the differences for these authorial strategies.

Since Truman Capote wrote *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *In Cold Blood,* it is also a useful selection for showing students how one author can narrate in a different voice. Students can compare selections of

the novella to *In Cold Blood* to examine the differences in the author's writing style. A teacher could also show sections of the Audrey Hepburn movie, *Breakfast at Tiffany's,* to compare the tone of the romantic movie to Capote's story, which is far darker than the film. However, that takes up more class time than the lesson involving "A Christmas Memory." Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* has a completely different quality and nature, however, and provides good discussion regarding purpose, audience, and intent.

Examining *Pathos*

Once students start to see a definite preference in Capote for Smith, a good activity to discuss *pathos,* or appeals to emotion, is a comparison of Smith and Hickock, the two murderers. I typically discuss the details that are included about Smith—his sister's letter, his father's interview, etc.—and how that information is used to convey that Smith was an abused, ignored child with little hope or intelligence. Readers quickly infer that Smith suffers from some form of mental illness as the narrator includes dreams about a bird that visits Smith. Information about Hickock is scarce in comparison. These included details illustrate a lot because "[w]hen writers draw on the emotions and interests of readers, and highlight them, they use *pathos,* the most powerful appeal" (Roskelly 10; italics in original). The lack of details regarding Hickock speaks just as loudly, if students are encouraged to notice it. I ask students to keep a chart of information for both killers in the middle of Part II (see fig. 2). It does not take long for them to see Capote's inequitable treatment of them, and then the students can discuss what that means. Once Capote's favoritism of Perry is noted, students can pull paragraphs to analyze tone, syntax, and diction to find more examples of partiality.

FIGURE 2. *In Cold Blood*
Name _____

PART II: PERSONS UNKNOWN
Directions: Use this chart to record the stylistic differences in Capote's writing as he describes Dick Hickock and Perry Smith in Part II. In each column, provide textual evidence of these distinctions, note the stylistic device used, and write any thoughts you have about these notes. At the bottom, please summarize your annotations and draw a conclusion about Capote's purpose in his presentation of these men. Stylistic devices to look for include details, tone, figurative language, diction, and syntax. I have provided two examples. Please write down the page number next to the quote.

STYLISTIC DEVICE	DICK HICKOCK	STYLISTIC DEVICE	PERRY SMITH
Detail Syntax—use of dashes and italicized word	Perry says, "Dick, if he knew Dick, and he did—now he did—would spend it right away on vodka and women" (119). *This detail presents Dick as a womanizer and a drunk. The syntax (dashes/italics) shows Perry as being wise and superior. He's more likable than Dick.*	Detail Figurative Language—strong adjectives Syntax—dramatic pause with "as though at last," almost wistful	Otto's drawings of Perry: "Perry's expression, his look of unflawed fulfillment, of beatitude, as though at last, and as in one of his dreams, a tall yellow bird had hauled him to heaven" (120). *In this entire chapter, Otto draws portraits of Perry. Does that mean that he's worthy of being drawn? Is he overtly attractive, or somehow precious?*
			Add more columns

Summary of observations: (What did you notice?)

Conclusion of observations: (What do you think accounts for the differences?)

The Value

Through these lessons students recognize how to engage with a text and question an author by recognizing that writers have agendas other than making money or getting published. The primary objective for me is to teach my readers and writers the command of voice. I want students to understand how it can empower their writing; likewise, students must understand how uncontrolled voice can hinder what writers are trying to communicate. Capote was castigated for his attempts at making a martyr out of Smith when he was obviously a brutal killer of an innocent family that lived on the plains of Kansas. This result is a reminder of the power of rhetoric. Students must learn to question writers. The final job is for students to learn how to manipulate their rhetorical devices for their own purposes. But that, I dare say, is another lesson.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

See the lesson plan "What's the Purpose?: Examining a Cold Manipulation of Language," which is based on the above article and written by the same author. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/what-purpose-examining-cold-30653.html

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Dog Moon Turkey

The thick gristle of the wing bone of
the wild turkey lifting its gaggle off
the ground, the dog in a hopeful ecstasy
of chase.
That's what I'd arrange to be
tomorrow if tomorrow were to choose
me as target.
A spill of bluets
on the grass now, dropped last night by a moon
carrying more milk than its bucket holds.

The turkey thinks it's beautiful. The moon
plays Jackson Pollock on the grass.
The dog chases what it knows it can't catch.

—Roger Mitchell

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Karen A. Keely

Dangerous Words: Recognizing the Power of Language by Researching Derogatory Terms

A high school teacher describes an assignment in which students study the histories and social reception of words (in some cases considered obscenities) used to insult people of various social categories. Students come to recognize the powerful, sometimes damaging effects of language, enabling them to fight those effects intellectually. Many derogatory terms are cited as examples in this essay.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

Yeah, right.

Those of us who have survived the verbal exchanges of the playground, the cafeteria, and perhaps even the faculty room know all too well how wounding words can be, and we don't believe for a minute this platitude about the innocuousness of language. Words are powerful, and that power can be used for good or ill. This essay describes a research assignment that provoked students into grappling with the potentially destructive force of fraught words. The project gave students from oppressed groups the opportunity to "fight back" intellectually against the forces that sometimes seem arrayed against them. It gave students of privilege a new lens through which to see and understand discrimination. And in both cases, most students enjoyed and felt proud of the work that they did so that it was a positive personal as well as academic experience; they clearly felt intellectual ownership over their research and their argument.[1]

Be warned: The assignment requires a safe environment, a commitment to facing squarely difficult language, and a certain deftness on the part of the teacher and his or her administrators in responding to students' bravery and boldness. I received the blessing of both my department chair and upper school head before launching this assignment for my eleventh graders, and I'd recommend similar caution to those thinking of adopting this project.

Another warning: Because this assignment takes the study of language seriously, in this article I have not used euphemisms or ellipses to replace the actual words my students and I studied. We researched troubling and vulgar words, and so those words appear in this essay, as they did in my students' work for the duration of the assignment. This is not language we expect in either classroom settings or in scholarship, and yet it is language that we all recognize as powerful and thus, I would argue, as worth serious study. My students and I talked intentionally and at length about why and how they were ready to tackle such a topic with maturity and critical thinking but also why they needed to be careful about the contexts in which they discussed their chosen words and their research; this caution was a common refrain in our work on this assignment, since I didn't want younger students or siblings to be affected negatively by a project that was a challenge even for high school juniors.

The Assignment

Last year, faced once again with teaching Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and its powerful, troubling language, I decided to tackle more directly than I ever had previously the challenge of the novel's 200-plus uses of the word *nigger.* Certainly I had never allowed students to wade into

those linguistic waters unprepared, but I had always found my students disturbingly willing to accept without much questioning that Twain's offensive language worked for his larger purposes in the novel. (I teach in a suburban school with a majority white population, a social context I discuss more fully below.) I wanted students to wrestle more with the power and problem of language, not necessarily to arrive at a different conclusion about Twain's use of *nigger* but to do so more thoughtfully.

I was pushed to do more than fret about this situation by my participation in the July 2009 National Endowment for the Humanities workshop "*Huckleberry Finn* in Post-Reconstruction America: Mark Twain's Hartford Years, 1871–1891." In particular, I couldn't get out of my mind a presentation by Ann Ryan, who is troubled by the casual dismissal of complaints against *Huck Finn* in high schools. She asked, What if we decided to teach a novel that used the word *cunt* 232 times, but we said to our students, "It's really a novel of liberation, one that's arguing for women's freedoms, with a main character who's doing the best he can within his social context"? Would English departments embrace the novel under those circumstances, or would we decide that it was too destructive to have our female students metaphorically punched in the gut every time they read this word? Troubled by her question, I read Randall Kennedy's *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word,* and slowly the idea for a research assignment formed, one that grows out of Gaylyn Karle Anderson's "I Search a Word" assignment that I had used successfully before but that takes for its subject not abstract words such as *envy, joy,* or *success,* but derogatory slurs such as *kike, bitch,* and *chink.* We were going to face the dangers of language head on.

After a couple of days of discussion, I gave my students their Dangerous Words assignment. They were to write a personal, researched essay—that is, a first-person essay that included their thoughtful reflections on their research and possibly their own experiences—on a "dangerous word," a vulgar slur about an ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual identity, religion, or some other social category.

I launched the project in March, at which point my students and I had been working together for several months, had developed mutual trust within our classes, and had several times discussed the power of language and the significance of rhetorical context and audience. We took a short break midway through *Huckleberry Finn* to read and talk about the lengthy first chapter of Kennedy's book, in which he provides extensive etymological, historical, political, and cultural history of the word *nigger.* Kennedy confounds students' expectations by ultimately siding against what he terms "eradicationists" who are calling for the elimination of this word; rather, he argues that it can be a powerful and anti-racist word when used for some purposes and in some contexts (such as Richard Pryor's early comedic work and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*). Kennedy's work is flying in the face of taboo, and the students were intrigued and nervous but rose to the occasion in their response to Kennedy.

After a couple of days of discussion, I gave my students their Dangerous Words assignment. They were to write a personal, researched essay—that is, a first-person essay that included their thoughtful reflections on their research and possibly their own experiences—on a "dangerous word," a vulgar slur about an ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual identity, religion, or some other social category. This word did not need to apply to their own social categories, but it needed to be a word about which they had personal questions, opinions, or experiences. Their essays were to explore the history, usage, and connotations of the word and make an argument about what its use should be in the contemporary world.

After they had been doing research for a couple of weeks (during which we continued reading *Huckleberry Finn*), I provided another model to complement Kennedy's, a sample essay I had written on the word *dyke,* which none of the students had chosen for their own papers. Going through the same research process I was requiring of the students, I wrote an essay that reflected both intellectually and personally on my research, thus modeling what it means to engage meaningfully with the results of one's research. I made a different argument from Kennedy's, taking a more eradicationist stance in terms of the general public's use of the word but reserving the right for an in-group to adopt language to describe itself, and in doing so I stressed the spectrum of arguments that was available to the students for their papers. Many of the students

relied heavily on this model as an example of one way to organize material, to respond to research, and to cite sources correctly.

The Words

My assignment sheet ended with this note, one that I reiterated in the first and subsequent classes in which we worked on the project:

> This is a challenging assignment, one that I'm giving you all because I've been impressed with your thoughtfulness and maturity this year. I recognize that spending quality time on and thinking deeply about an offensive word can be difficult, emotional, frustrating, even frightening. Please know that I am happy to talk with you about this assignment and to help with the personal and academic challenges that it poses.

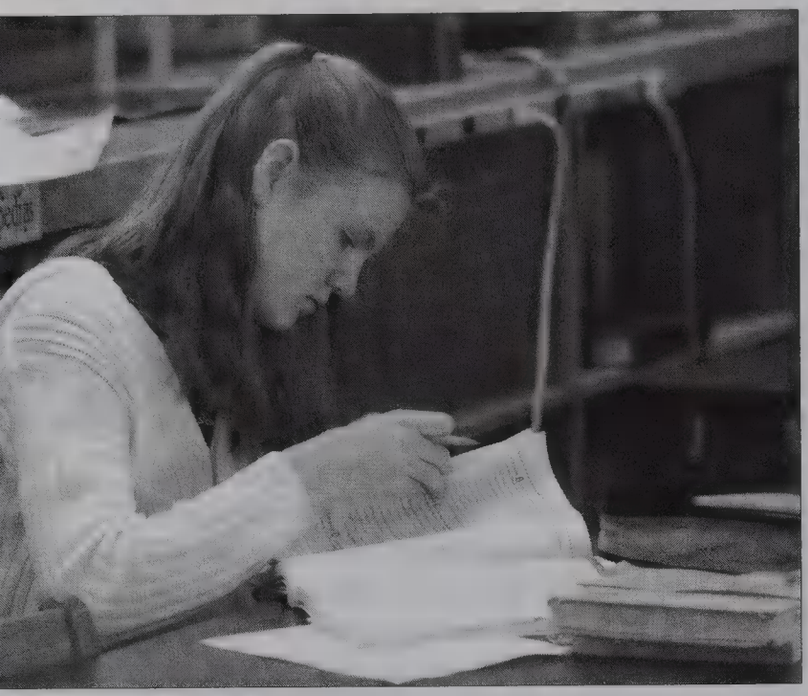
However, I seemed to worry more than any of the students about the emotional costs of the dangerous words. Perhaps because they chose wisely (as I'd recommended) to tackle words that would not pose a serious threat to their well-being (and there were a couple of students who chose less politically charged options, such as *lame* or *nerd*), or perhaps because, as many of them argued, the words that seem dangerous to one generation are often regarded as milder by the next generation, it was not the immersing themselves in disturbing rhetoric that troubled my students, at least on the surface. It was the actual research and writing that caused them difficulty, ranging from some students' exhilarating intellectual challenge to others' frustration at making sense of the sheer quantity of information that they uncovered. Still, the majority of students found it exciting to do serious academic research about a vulgar word of their own choosing, many of them afterward noting that they had found rewarding the experience of becoming experts on the histories and nuances of their selected words.

Troubling words are powerful and thus worthy of serious study. (© Photos.com, a division of Getty Images.)

I teach at a girls' high school, and so it is probably no surprise that the largest category of words the students chose to investigate were those about gender, with *bitch* as the most commonly selected (chosen by six of my 40 students). Related gendered terms that included sexuality were the next largest category, with three students choosing *whore,* one *slut,* and two *pussy.* Interestingly, the students who wrote about *bitch, whore,* and *slut* were divided in their ultimate arguments about the appropriate use of the word in modern society, with some students maintaining that these were dangerous words that should be eliminated and others insisting that the words had by now lost most or all of their negative impact and were available for casual, friendly discourse. The two students who chose the word *pussy* both argued that it was in all circumstances demeaning to women, and one of them wrote a sophisticated analysis of the synecdoche of referring to a woman in terms of her genitalia. The few students who wanted to research language of sexual identity did so by choosing the word *faggot,* a term about men that clearly did not apply to anyone in the all-female class; they were universal in their condemnation of the word, rejecting its potential use as in-group language by those who might positively reclaim the word.

Although predominantly white, my school has a significant population of international students and domestic students of color, and many of these students chose words that could be applied to their own ethnic or national communities, researching words such as *wetback, oriental, Jap, FOB* ("fresh off the boat"), and *dark/darkie.* Two Jewish students also selected the word *kike* to explore. All of these students were unanimous in their condemnation of their chosen dangerous words, to the extent that a couple of times I reminded them of the different position that Kennedy, an African American, had taken about the word *nigger*; I didn't want to change their minds, but instead I wanted the students to arrive at their conclusions thoughtfully rather than automatically.

Another common choice of words was *retard,* a consequence both of the school's active Best Buddies program, in which our students are matched with people



After the students had chosen words to study, we spent a day together in the computer lab, working through the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions of their words and the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper). (Thompson-McClellan Photography)

of a similar age who have mental disabilities, and of the word's presence in the news in spring 2010. Because of the Special Olympics "Ban the R-Word" campaign, I had to push this group of students a little more than the others to think independently rather than simply to reiterate the rhetoric they were hearing in Best Buddies meetings. At the same time, these students were probably more primed than others to recognize that, in the words of the R-Word campaign, "Our language frames how we think about others" (Special Olympics).

I did not offer students a list of words from which they could choose, although in talking about Kennedy's work we brainstormed a list of possibilities. After the project was over, several students suggested that my giving them a list of words to choose from would have been a welcome addition to the assignment, but that is one piece of advice that I don't plan on taking in future years because it doesn't seem necessary in our school's social context, and I think that each student's figuring out which words seem offensive is one of the important components of the project. Moreover, several students chose terms that I either didn't know or wouldn't have thought about putting on a list, and I would hate to have my own list cut off meaningful possibilities for student investigation.

That being said, the social context of one's school is clearly a significant factor in determining guidelines and parameters for this assignment. I teach in a girls' school of under 500 students in grades 6 through 12, a school that privileges the ideal of sisterhood and what we might call "niceness," so I wasn't particularly worried that this assignment would exacerbate tensions within the school, and it didn't. Moreover, and perhaps in the spirit of "niceness," students mostly steered away from words that might touch on any intra-community difficulties, particularly areas of class difference and of sexual identity, and chose only those ethnicity-related terms that applied to themselves, reducing the possibility of offending fellow students. (A 2010 student diversity survey indicated a largely healthy and welcoming school environment, with 85% of upper school students agreeing that "It is easy for people like me to be accepted here," but did highlight international differences, class status, and sexual identity as the tensions within the student population.) Obviously school situations differ widely, and it seems paramount for a teacher considering adopting this assignment to think carefully about his or her school's social context and student body when determining parameters for this research paper and the words that students may choose. In different school contexts, a teacher might, for example, ask students to choose only words that apply to themselves.

The Research

After the students had chosen their words, we spent a day together in the computer lab, working through the *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions of their words and the Online Etymology Dictionary (Harper). I suggested that students look up their words in a couple of dictionaries of slang that I had put on reserve in our library as well as use the Urban Dictionary, an online reference for slang (http://www.urbandictionary.com); this research provided opportunities for interesting discussions about the difference between "authoritative" and "common" definitions of words. I also asked students to investigate historical uses of their chosen word by looking it up in the Historical *New York Times* or ProQuest Newspapers, as well as in Bartleby.com, a compilation of quotations, poetry, literature, Shakespeare's

works, and the King James translation of the Bible. Finally, I asked students to search for their word in the academic journal *American Speech* (available through Project MUSE and other online academic databases). I had to make clear to students that they would probably not find their word in all of these sources, which for many of them was their first, frustrating experience of the multiple dead ends that inevitably characterize a true research project.

My assignment sheet clearly laid out these many resources and gave students explicit instructions (including the school's passwords in some cases) for accessing these mostly electronic research tools. Despite these extensive instructions, most students' initial move was to go immediately to the Google search. This wasn't a bad impulse—although I could wish it weren't their very first—but it required careful, usually one-on-one discussion about the evaluation of Web sources, an important but time-consuming lesson. For example, every student who wrote about *faggot* ran across the same website, one with no author, institution, or research listed, which claimed that the word derived from the European Inquisition, in which gay men were forced to gather the wood (that is, the fagots) used to burn witches and were then themselves thrown onto the fire when the wood ran out ("The Origin of the Word: Faggot")—a misleading assertion for which there is no evidence, but the fact that it appeared online made it difficult for some students to wrap their heads around its fallibility. Every librarian and teacher who works with student research deals with this issue, and this assignment was no different, although the stakes seemed higher, both for me (after all, I didn't want them to get misinformation about vulgar words in current circulation) and, fortunately, for them, which meant that most students were willing to work harder than usual to track down good information. And most of them rose to the challenge of correct citation as well; I found that making it a question less of "correctness" than of fairness—giving credit where credit is due—seemed to tap into students' beliefs about justice.

Because we were conducting sociolinguistic investigations, I also allowed students to interview and poll other people about the word, which led to their conducting some interesting conversations with parents, grandparents, and older family friends about earlier generations' understandings and uses of their researched word. Many students particularly liked this aspect of the assignment because it enabled them to have honest, thoughtful, and mature discussion with people they respected. In some cases, students also contacted friends from other countries to find out about cultural differences in the understanding of a vulgar word. A few students had difficulty in recognizing that their school friends were not necessarily an authoritative source for a word's wider use, as in the case of one student who insisted that the word *kike* was no longer part of the language because the three high school friends she'd asked about it didn't know the term.

This assignment thus had the usual difficulties of any research project, but I found most students were more willing to do the hard work of finding and evaluating sources and thinking through their implications because they were invested in the topic and found it personally meaningful. Indeed, the next autumn several of the students, now seniors, identified this research assignment as one of the more profound academic experiences of their high school education, and I certainly found it such as a teacher. At the end of the project, one student articulated clearly what had worked so well in this research paper: "This assignment helped me realize the power that words hold. I liked the idea of learning so much about one specific word that holds so much power because we often take words for granted and forget the impact that they actually have."

Because we were conducting sociolinguistic investigations, I also allowed students to interview and poll other people about the word, which led to their conducting some interesting conversations with parents, grandparents, and older family friends about earlier generations' understandings and uses of their researched word.

Most of the students who embarked on this research project were doing scholarly work at a level that would be appropriate for college; for many of them, it was their first experience of making an original academic contribution, a level of scholarly achievement that students rarely attain in high school. The vast majority of students found it exciting to become an expert on words that so many people use simplistically or unthinkingly, and I'm

proud of my students for working to understand language more fully than do many of the adults around them. As one student noted afterward, "I liked that I had never read something just like what I was writing. . . . I felt what I was saying was original, new and mine."

Preparing for the Public Sphere

The Dangerous Words assignment was thus a deeply intellectual research project that was at the same time unapologetically personal and political, and my hope is that the students are as a result better able to make connections for themselves between their education and their relationship to the society in which they live. If one of our goals as teachers is to prepare young people to take their place in the world, it is paramount to recognize that, for most of them, that world contains vulgarity as well as poetry. How many of my female students will at some point be told, "Hey, don't be a bitch" or hear from a date, "I'll tell everyone you're a slut"? How many young men will be faced with ethnic slurs or have their masculinity questioned? My hope is that this assignment helps some students move from an adrenal to an intellectual response when derogatory language is hurled at them, perhaps allowing them to make more responsible life decisions as they face a world of poorly behaved peers. And if the language of the public sphere continues to trade in divisive innuendo and insult, then it may be that only students who have thought historically, culturally, and linguistically about derogatory language will be equipped to take their place as citizen-rhetors.

Note

1. My thanks to Sarah Dylan Breuer, to *English Journal*'s two anonymous reviewers, and to editor Ken Lindblom for suggestions that improved this essay.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Like the assignment described in the article above, some important and effective classroom activities can be charged with controversy. "Teaching Racially Sensitive Literature: A Teacher's Guide" is a resource from ReadWriteThink.org that can help support teachers' efforts to read with their students any piece of literature that may be deemed racially sensitive. http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1118/Chadwick.pdf

Paul Larochelle

Found in Translations: Using Multiple Versions of Translated Text for Close Analysis of Language

Inspired by a classroom mishap regarding translations of Elie Wiesel's* Night, *Larochelle uses multiple text translations to engage students in discussions of connotation, diction, syntax, and other important features of literary language. He closes with suggestions for translations of other texts.

Like most good ideas, this one came to me by accident, an accident that looked, at first, like an inconvenience. We were studying Elie Wiesel's *Night* in my tenth-grade English class, using Stella Rodway's translation from the French. My intention for including the text was primarily as a counterpart to our study of *The Merchant of Venice,* to help students view anti-Semitism in the play with greater sensitivity and an awareness of its most tragic results. It was also important to me to include a work in translation somewhere within the syllabus as well as autobiographical writing. While I knew the text would offer many opportunities to evaluate literary choices made by Wiesel in writing about his experiences, I did not predict the fruitful or engaging manner in which this analysis was inevitably to take place.

I have an eager student to thank. Alex was insistent on buying her own copies of texts so that she could fill them with her notes. When I announced that we would soon start studying *Night,* she ran out to buy herself a copy. Normally, she would try to buy the same edition of the book so that she would have the same page numbers, but only when one was readily available. Alex was a strong enough student to follow class discussions even if the page references were not exact. It never occurred to her, or to me for that matter, that a different translation existed. As I passed out the books in class, Alex declined a copy, letting me know she had purchased her own. When we reconvened to discuss the first section of the book, Alex looked perplexed.

"It doesn't say that in my book."

I had a look for myself and quickly realized her translation was different: a new translation by the writer's wife, Marion Wiesel. My first reaction was to apologize for not having the forethought to remind her to buy the same translation. Flippantly, I told her it might be interesting to note the differences, and we carried on with our discussion.

"No one prayed so that the night would pass quickly" (Rodway 32): We arrived at that line, where Wiesel describes his family's first uncertain night in the unguarded "little ghetto" (31), and began to discuss its significance to the role of faith and night in the early part of the book. I was quickly interrupted.

"Wait a minute. Mine says something very different," my eager student mentioned.

"What does it say?" I asked, doubtful it would be significant.

"No one was praying for the night to pass quickly" (Wiesel 21).

Suddenly, we were in business. Sleepy eyes opened and sluggish bodies bolted upright. Alex's classmates looked over her shoulder to see if that difference was really there in print. I had to see it for myself. We were perplexed. These two sentences could suggest two completely different actions and motivations. Had they prayed or not prayed? Had they wanted the night to pass quickly or not at all? Which was correct? We were unable to get our hands on a French edition right away to try to determine accuracy, so we began to analyze the different suggested meanings of these sentences. Which seemed most logical in the moment? Which of the

two translators had a better chance of getting it "right"? Is it possible Marion Wiesel was unaware of the ambiguity of her translation? Students were surprised by the difference in meaning and clarity that seemed to boil down to the choice between "for" and "so that."

This fortunate accident refocused my approach to teaching close language analysis with *Night.* The idea that the "same" book could have so many differences intrigued the students and they craved opportunities to ask Alex, "What does yours say?" I bought myself a copy of Wiesel's translation and looked for extracts where the two versions featured meaningful differences. The differences were rarely as confusing in meaning as in the first example, but that was so much the better. These differences were subtle and resulted in the most effective close analysis task I have found for evaluating **connotation, diction,** and **syntax.**

Strategy in Practice: Comparing the Translations of *Night*

I asked students to work in pairs with their assigned extracts, which I printed side by side and copied onto large sheets of paper. They were instructed to read and highlight differences, then to evaluate which version of a given moment they preferred and to justify their choices. The activity, detective work by nature, motivated the students and kept them fully engaged in the work of language analysis. They could also see a practical purpose for this work. Which translation would they recommend to a friend? The overall answer was not easy, as each version featured moments that were superior to the other, for subtle reasons. We made certain to recognize that our study was not evaluating the quality of the *translation* per se, as few of us had any chance of reading the work in its original language, but how the writing in English moved and affected us as readers in relation to the content.

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Some of the comparisons made in class revealed differences between **literary diction** and more **idiomatic expressions**. In the case of Rodway's "I had ceased to feel fear" (47) versus Wiesel's "I no longer was afraid" (36), students primarily noted that the verb *ceased* intensified the feeling of the moment, citing the use of **heightened language** as an indication of an experience out of the ordinary. Additionally, many students appreciated the poetic use of **alliteration** in Rodway's version that emphasized the key concept "fear," while some preferred the more **colloquial, passive voice** of Wiesel's translation. Similarly, students analyzed the difference in being "overcome by an *inhuman weariness*" (Rodway 47; italics added) versus "fatigue" (Wiesel 36), observing that the diction of the former helped develop the theme of dehumanization in the novel while the latter merely communicated an idea. Some felt Rodway's translation to be overwrought and Wiesel's more in keeping with the simplicity and directness that seemed to characterize much of the book. However, another pair of students quickly responded to this discussion with an example from a different part of the book where Wiesel's translation highlighted this dehumanization with its use of the verb "herded" (37) to describe the movement of people in place of Rodway's less evocative "made to go" (49). Now students were not only fully engaged in language analysis but also in carefully selecting textual evidence for the sake of argument. When students were unable to find the literary terminology to describe the differences they noticed, I (re)taught it, with the additional benefit that students had a practical reason for needing to use it. Just in the few discussion points mentioned above, I had the opportunity to reinforce understanding of diction, connotation, active voice, and passive voice, all elements of the writer's craft we want students to be attentive to in their analysis of others' writing, as well as make discerning use of in their own.

Beyond opportunities to look at connotative distinctions in diction, the subtle differences between the two translations provided excellent opportunities to attend to issues of grammar and style from a constructivist approach. First, students were presented with translated pairings such as the one below:

> Crouching in her corner, her blank gaze fixed on some faraway place, she no longer saw us. (Wiesel 26)

> Crouched in her corner, her bewildered gaze scouring the emptiness, she could no longer see us. (Rodway 37)

Students were asked to comment on what they noticed as the differences between the two sentences. Naturally, students cited the difference between "crouching" and "crouched," "see" and "saw," "blank" and "bewildered," "faraway place" and "emptiness," and "gaze fixed" versus "gaze scouring." After identifying these differences, students were encouraged to offer an analysis of the different effects, often through directed questioning when they needed a bit of prodding. Students spoke of a "faraway place" having connotations of fantasy, while "emptiness" suggested something lost, a sense of isolation and loneliness. They felt that the idea of contemplating some "faraway place" may have been a more immediately accessible concept than "scouring the emptiness" but that Rodway's version was more emotionally linked to the moment. However, they preferred the idea of being "fixed" to that of "scouring," noting that the passive nature of "fixed" suited the moment more effectively than the active, almost aggressive concept of "scouring." This observation, the one I was waiting for, invited not only a discussion of connotation but also of syntax. In particular, it opened the door for a lesson on **present** versus **past participles**.

I redirected students to the first **participial phrase** of each version and asked which they preferred, the present "Crouching in her corner" or the past "Crouched in her corner." This line of questioning did not yield a significant response, though one student mentioned that the use of the past tense seemed to signal that this idea was less important than the one to come. With that, the students had begun to construct an understanding of the concept of **subordination**. We also noticed the inverted structure between the two versions. Wiesel started with the present participle followed by the past, thus making the act of "crouching" more active than the appropriately passive act of being "fixed," whereas Rodway started with the past participle and moved to the present, rendering the crouching less active and the "scouring" too active for the tastes of the students. Much to their chagrin, students were beginning to see how the grammar of the sentence actually supported or controlled some of their emotional response to the ideas.

Here are a few other sentence pairs that resulted in fruitful discussions, offered to those who teach *Night* in their classes:

> "I started to breathe normally again as I listened to the rhythmic pounding of the wheels on the tracks as the train raced through the night" (Wiesel 26).
>
> "I had begun to breathe normally again. We could hear the wheels churning out that monotonous rhythm of a train travelling through the night" (Rodway 37).

> "Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns" (Wiesel 6).
>
> "Babies were thrown into the air and the machine gunners used them as targets" (Rodway 16).

> "I didn't know that this was the moment in time and the place where I was leaving my mother and Tzipora forever" (Wiesel 29).
>
> "And I did not know that in that place, at that moment, I was parting from my mother and Tzipora forever" (Rodway 40).

I have placed in boldface all the grammatical and literary terms that emerged through this constructivist experience to emphasize what the strategy makes possible. I do not, however, wish to exaggerate its effect. My students are not now experts on all of these terms. They are not model grammarians who can diagram sentences with expert precision like students of old. What they *are* is more aware of the choices available to writers, and what they *have* is a keener sense of some of the effects of those different choices.

Recommended Texts for Comparing Translations

I have since made use of this strategy in other classes. When studying Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* we looked at various translations of the final line in act 3, starting with T. Weber's laughably verbose version from 1880, "That cohabitation between you and me might become matrimony. Good-bye" (qtd. in Gray 70), and moving through the years to 1965 and Peter Watts's more palatable, "That our life together could be a real marriage. Good-bye" (qtd. in Gray 71). Students analyzed this progression as it

related to naturalism on stage, as well as how difficult the work of the translator can be to balance faithfulness to the original language and natural idiom in the language of translation.

For your consideration, I offer a list of books that might invite this kind of language investigation in your classroom.

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:* Compare any available translation with Simon Armitage's.
- *Beowulf:* Pair any translation with Seamus Heaney's.
- *Antigone* by Sophocles: Compare any two translations. Or, for a more radical look at differences between translation and adaptation, compare Jean Anouilh's to Bertolt Brecht's. There is also a Seamus Heaney adaptation called *The Burial at Thebes.*
- *The Odyssey* by Homer: Like Antigone, any two translations can be compared, but it might also be fun to compare traditional translations with dramatizations of the work (such as the version Simon Armitage wrote for BBC Radio). It could also offer an opportunity to compare poetic forms, such as Alexander Pope's 1725 translation in rhyming couplets with a blank verse translation.
- *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles
- *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen: Compare any translation with Paul Walsh's, which claims to make the language more accessible and realistic to modern American audiences.
- The Bible: Compare any two different versions.

This is only a brief list based on texts that I teach or that interest me. Consider looking for alternative translations of any translated text you teach and search for moments to compare. The resulting discussion is almost always rich in its observations.

Reading to Writing Connection

It was valuable for students to realize that there were moments when each translation of *Night* shined, moments when each translation paled in comparison to its partner, and moments when we agreed on the varying effects of the language but disagreed on which we preferred. What greater way for students to realize the value of feedback and peer review? Even when comparing the writing of two *published* writers, we could find instances where better choices were available. Once they have experienced this productive criticism, students can approach their own work and feedback with a greater sense of humility and open-mindedness.

To help make the link, students can imagine their own writing as a translation of someone else's words in another language. They should ask themselves, *How might someone else translate this sentence?* This may lead to inspired new wordings of a sentence, thus varying the syntax and diction of an essay. The imagined distance from their own writing may just give them the permission and creative flexibility they need to make meaningful revisions.

Conclusion

Having taught the International Baccalaureate A1 English course for the first time during the past two years, my interest in strengthening students' skills in close language analysis has increased. To prepare students for the rigorous tasks of the unseen written commentary and the oral commentary on an extract from a studied text, I have had to explore new ways of engaging students in attending to the subtleties of language. I have a student to thank for helping me to discover a strategy that motivates students to pay attention to the choices at a writer's disposal. We have an unusual opportunity for rich and organic language analysis lessons when we teach texts in translation. No such opportunities exist when we study literature originally written in English, but the experiences gained through comparing multiple translations of literary text greatly affect our ability to analyze the singular choices of an author in English.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Reading Literature in Translation: *Beowulf* as a Case Study," students compare translations of *Beowulf* with each other and with the basic poetic elements of Old English alliterative verse. Students reflect on the nature of translation as an act of interpretive re-creation. Students first listen to several translations of a passage from *Beowulf*, keeping a running list of how the translations differ and why the differences may exist. Next, groups of students compare new translations of the passage with the Old English poem using the checklist previously created. Finally, students share their findings as a class and discuss what it means to translate literary works and the decisions that translators make. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/reading-literature-translation-beowulf-814.html

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quilting

he woke to the word *puritan*—

monastic may have been a better word
(but a word crafted in thought not sleep)—

as it was the sole life he walked in as well—
binding him—piercing through the borders—

puritan (although it tasted *monastic*)

the bottom of his foot?
the only one?
this fish?

# # #

and there were whole sentences—

first—

i have sewn together
remnants of beautiful days . . .

and later—

i had a bad day once
for 38 years

until i met you . . .

# # #

in one photograph she is wearing a red top
(red like the bottle opener
hanging on the wall)
that leaves her bare from breastbone up

she is peeling apart slices of ham
conjuring 3 sandwiches—her bicep tattoo
even with the band of that red top

(he doesn't even have an actual photograph
only a digital file on his computer)—

. . . her pants black—her blonde hair long—
the bowls and lamp dark dark blue . . .

# # #

he also struggled with *quirky* and *quaint*—
like the other photograph—
she is looking down—arms and shoulders exposed
by her black and lace camisole—
one hand on her hip—one hand on the wall . . .

# # #

he was in stitches but it was no laughing matter

and he thought—

please do not simply hang this on the wall . . .

needle and thread are poor resources
for memory and longing
for electronic media
for stoic fingers with utilitarian missions

this puritan
(this monk)
devoted to quilting

—Paul Thomas

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Paul Thomas taught high school ELA for 18 years before turning to teacher education. Currently associate professor at Furman University, he has published poetry, fiction, and scholarly work for many years. You can view his writing life at one of his blogs: http://wrestlingwithwriting.blogspot.com/. Email him at Paul.Thomas@furman.edu.

Lance Massey

On the Richness of Grammar as an Analytical Lens in the Integrated Language Arts

Using William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow," Massey demonstrates how reading a poem for grammatical features, such as adjectives, adjectivals, adverbs, and adverbials, can help students develop a richer understanding of how language works to evoke mood, setting, and more.

As a teacher of Bowling Green State University's English 3810, Grammar and Writing, I am charged with teaching future language arts teachers how to teach grammar so that it actually helps their students become better writers and communicators. And because such teaching rejects the ineffective but time-honored drill-it-and-kill-it approach, in which students are bombarded with decontextualized grammar lessons and worksheets, my effort to expose my students to new teaching techniques and philosophies is simultaneously an effort to get them to forget much of what they thought they knew—by virtue of having undergone it themselves—about grammar instruction. This pragmatic approach to grammar instruction means that I try to convince my students to teach grammar from both a descriptive (as opposed to prescriptive) and rhetorical stance, which includes the following:

- honoring linguistic differences and recognizing the utility and validity of nonstandard dialects and other rule-governed usages that depart from Standard English;
- teaching grammar in the context of students' writing whenever possible instead of relying on acontextual, general lessons; and
- seeing grammar not as an absolute standard to be lived up to but as a communicative tool that can be manipulated for rhetorical effect as audiences, purposes, and contexts for writing change.

One implication of this approach (and particularly the last element of this list) is that, far from merely being a superficial feature of writing—a formal adornment draped over some deeper substance known as "content," or perhaps a rigid mold into which substantive content is poured—grammar can and does play an important role in the construction of textual meaning. After all, grammatical choices can affect levels of formality, amplify poetic language and meaning, and even reflect deep epistemological orientations (as in the oft-cited example of scientific writing relying on passive voice because of its seeming neutrality). Grammar thus marks an important point of contact between form and content, and, as such, it also constitutes a powerful analytical lens for textual (i.e., literary/rhetorical) analysis and criticism, which remains a bedrock of an integrated language arts curriculum.

This is neither obvious to students nor easy for them to grasp, so I am continually inventing new activities and assignments to help them do so. In what follows, I describe one such activity, in which students analyze William Carlos Williams's distinctive use of modification—adjectives, adverbs, adjectivals, and adverbials—in his famous poem "The Red Wheelbarrow" and ask how this use mirrors and enhances meaning. In short, this activity treats grammar as an important *stylistic* (and therefore rhetorical) aspect of writing.

I emphasize this last point to call attention to the fact that what I write about here is not, in its most basic sense, a grammar lesson. It is a way of looking at a text's grammatical form (or, from a rhetorical perspective, an author's grammatical choices) to tease out that text's meanings, in all of their subtlety and depth.

Before getting to my discussion of the activity, however, I should note that, while I came to this approach in effect on my own, it has forerunners, particularly in the work of Virginia Tufte, whose 1971 book *Grammar as Style* espouses and explains "the literary merits of grammatical structures," including a chapter "in which Tufte shows us how writers use the syntax, punctuation, and diction at their disposal to create in language what the words themselves try to describe" (Edwards 11).

I also recognize the irony of submitting this lesson—reliant as it is on grammar—to an issue of *English Journal* that is themed "Beyond Grammar: The Richness of English Language." What I hope to show in the following discussion, however, is that grammar is deeply implicated in, and can be equally used to tease out, that richness, and, far from the dry, even punitive subject it is often portrayed to be, grammar can actually serve as an effective focal point for integrating many of the most important aspects of the language arts, including close reading skills, literary study, rhetorical analysis, and the study of English language forms.

Modification and Meaning in Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow"

The activity I describe below is part of a larger activity that includes the poetry of E. E. Cummings, Robert Frost, and Seamus Heaney, but for brevity's sake I focus on Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow," which is inevitably the most successful example in the activity. In this activity, I ask students to "identify and discuss the differences between these authors' uses of adjectives, adjectivals, adverbs, and/or adverbials. What are the effects of these uses on the poems? How do they help the authors convey a message, style, or mood?"

While originally I gave students, working in groups, 15 to 25 minutes in class to work through four poems, in recent classes I have assigned the activity as homework that we then discuss in class, first in groups, then as a whole class. Students have much more of substance to say about the poems in this format than they normally do after only in-class work, but they still struggle with "The Red Wheelbarrow":

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

They pick up on the single-word adjectives "red" and "white," and a few of them identify "so" or "glazed" as modifiers, but by and large they are stumped, even though they have had several weeks of grammar instruction, including lessons on adjectivals and adverbials.

At this point, I focus the students on talking about what the poem means: students invariably notice that the wheelbarrow is on a farm, and that without it much of the work of the farm would be more difficult, or even impossible. Other responses always note the simplicity of the poem, and occasionally students will suggest that it doesn't "mean" anything at all, that it is just a simple description of a simple scene. As this discussion develops, I begin steering things back to our analytical lens—grammar—with questions about the relationship between the grammar of the poem and the meanings we are finding (or not finding) in it.

I point out to students that the key to this poem—and, incidentally, the only part of the poem that is even remotely enigmatic—is the kernel clause and the opening preposition, "so much depends / upon." What, exactly, depends upon that wheelbarrow? Certainly, as my students aptly discern, the work of the farm to which it apparently belongs does: The wheelbarrow undoubtedly performs many tasks that are essential to life on a farm, making it a life-sustaining tool. But there is also a deeper, more abstract sense in which "so much depends upon" the wheelbarrow: As a quintessentially Imagist poem, "The Red Wheelbarrow" adheres to the idea that it is only in concrete images—not in the grandiose poetic flourishes and moral embellishments of, say, Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The

"The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams, from THE COLLECTED POEMS: VOLUME I, 1909–1939, copyright ©1938 by New Directions Publishing Corp. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Charge of the Light Brigade"—that true meaning can be found. Indeed, such images, for (the early) Williams, are more than just prerequisites for *any* meaning. Rather, they carry an almost infinite *density* of meaning, in which "words, things, people, and God vanish as separate entities and everything becomes a unit" (Miller 291).

Needless to say, this fact places a heavy burden on the image of the wheelbarrow. But the image is able to bear that burden precisely (if not exclusively) because of the similarly dense syntax of the sentence, in which modifiers within modifiers within modifiers within modifiers mirror the density of meaning in the wheelbarrow itself. Indeed, seven of the poem's eight lines—everything after "so much depends"—constitute a single prepositional phrase that functions adverbially to modify the verb "depends." Yet, within that phrase, we find, modifying "wheel barrow," two parallel adjectivals, "glazed with rain water" and "beside the white chickens," adding another layer of modification to the poem. As we dig still further, we see, within the phrase "glazed with rain water," the adverbial "with rain water" modifying the participle "glazed," revealing yet another layer. Now, taking the whole poem/sentence as a starting point, we are three layers down. But we are not done yet. One more layer of modification remains to be excavated: within the adverbial "with rain water," the word "rain," which is normally a noun or a verb, becomes an adjectival modifying "water."[1] In sum, there are *four layers of modification* lurking beneath the surface of this deceptively short, simple poem.

We do not, in short, put down our grammar books and then pick up our poetry books. They are the same book.

As I lead students through this explication, I note each layer by marking it on the poem itself, moving from square brackets (top layer) to parentheses to braces to chevrons (bottom layer), like the following:

> So much depends [upon a (red) (wheel) barrow (glazed {with <rain> water}) (beside the {white} chickens)].[2]

I might also translate the linear notation represented above into a spatial one, as represented in Figure 1 (with the numbers along the left side representing successive layers of modification). In this representation, one easily sees each layer of modification, which in turn emphasizes the grammatical density of the poem—a density that perfectly reflects the density of meaning Williams bestowed upon the wheelbarrow itself.

Toward an Integrated Approach

At the end of the class, as we go back and reflect on the day's lesson, students invariably report "getting" "The Red Wheelbarrow"—and getting poetry in general—in a way that they never would have on their own. This activity is one of the most commonly cited among my students when they recount the most enlightening aspects of the course. Students routinely point out that the lesson helps them "get a feel" for the ways that structures such as participial and prepositional phrases—often so lifeless on the pages even of good grammar books—actually make meaning in language. They also regularly note that the activity makes studying poetry interesting and fun in ways they hadn't experienced before. These two most common comments from students—that the activity helps them get a feel for grammatical forms and that it helps them learn about poetry—in addition to being deeply gratifying to me as a teacher, also point precisely to the *integrated* nature of the learning that happens in the activity. We do not, in short, put down our grammar books and then pick up our poetry books. They

FIGURE 1

	so much depends									
1		upon a		barrow						
2			red wheel		glazed			beside the		chickens
3						with	water		white	
4							rain			

are the same book, and the knowledge that issues from that book is strong by virtue of its tightly woven character.

I do not have any illusions that all or even most of my students will go into their first teaching jobs with all the tools and sensibilities they need either to help their students perform such nuanced formal analyses or to teach grammar from a rhetorical perspective; these things can, and usually do, take years of practice and honing. (My students recognize that, too, and this semester, on completing the activity, they explicitly asked me if we could do several more such activities so that they could "practice.") What's more, good theory often clashes with imperfect practice: They will have standardized tests to administer, prescribed curricula to follow, and administrators (who may or may not share their views about grammar) to please. But I am confident that, largely because of activities like this one, students leave my class with a deeper appreciation for the richness of English language and a stronger grasp of how to find that richness in—and extract it from—English's grammatical bones, both in their own writing and that of their students.

At the least, I am certain that a number of my students—I would venture to say a strong majority—who otherwise would have gone on to toe the "grammar police" line leave my class prepared to use language analysis to help their students *become better readers and writers* instead of better grammar-drill completers. And they will do so not by ignoring grammar altogether in their classrooms, but by understanding that grammar is an important part of writing to the extent that it has a rhetorical effect: it signifies specific meanings, affiliations, and aptitudes to readers.

The question remains, however, how my students might take an activity like this one and bring it into their secondary language arts classrooms. While this activity assumes a level of grammar knowledge not likely to be found in most secondary classrooms, there are ways that similar lessons can be tailored from this general approach.

Adapting the Lesson for Secondary Students

If I were doing this lesson in a secondary school setting, I would begin by offering a basic introduction to the grammar of the poem, focusing only on the two adjectival phrases (the participial and prepositional phrases). I would point out that two groups of words, known as phrases, act like adjectives modifying "wheel barrow"—one, beginning with a verb ending with "ed," that describes the appearance of the barrow; the other, beginning with the preposition "beside," describing its location. (My sense is that secondary students might be intimidated by the grammatical term "participle" but not "preposition." That is why I use the lay term "verb ending with 'ed'" instead.) Students would then be encouraged to complete a generative writing assignment, borrowing the structure of the poem and substituting objects and imagery of their own choosing in place of Williams's. I might even further scaffold the activity by suggesting students focus on the current season. For example, in winter a student may write, "So much depends upon a green spider plant, layered with dust, under a frosted window." Or, "So much depends upon a navy sweater, specked with lint, in a plastic laundry basket." As students compose two, three, or more such imitative poems (perhaps even combining in-class writing and homework), they will begin to internalize its rhythms and cadences—an internalization that can then be capitalized on in a class discussion about how and why Williams might have chosen to construct this one-sentence poem in this way, in which the teacher will have laid the groundwork for illuminating the grammatical structure of the poem in more detail. I might note, for example, that "within the phrase starting with 'glazed,' there's also a prepositional phrase beginning with 'with.' And what word does 'with rain water' describe?" Such a question can lead students to discover the adverbial within the adjectival and, eventually, the adjectival within the adverbial within the adjectival.

At the least, I am certain that a number of my students—I would venture to say a strong majority—who otherwise would have gone on to toe the "grammar police" line leave my class prepared to use language analysis to help their students *become better readers and writers* instead of better grammar-drill completers.

As the students, with the teacher's guidance, zero in on this fine-grained analysis—even if they only get some of the way there—teachers who do

this activity will then have the flexibility to turn it, depending on the unit or specific lesson plan it serves, into one of the following:

- a grammar lesson ("See how participles and prepositions work to add meaning to writing?");
- a lesson in producing descriptive imagery in poetic writing ("See how the image takes on depth and meaning with these descriptive modifiers?"); or
- a literature lesson ("See how the density of the poem's grammar mirrors the density of the image for Williams?").

The poem may serve as a focal point that a teacher returns to across various curricular divisions as a way to help students find an anchoring point for what can seem like many unrelated sub-areas within the language arts, including reading skills, writing skills, appreciation for literature, and understanding English language forms. In short, taking this approach and integrating awareness and study of grammar into other facets of the language arts curriculum can give students confidence as readers and writers, and it can help instill in them both a recognition and an appreciation of the richness of English language.

Notes

1. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes a New York newspaper's usage of "rainwater" as one word in 1887, as well as James Joyce's doing so in 1922, one year before the publication of "The Red Wheelbarrow," suggesting that there was indeed an element of choice in Williams's decision to use the separate words "rain" and "water." A similar argument can be made for "wheel" and "barrow" in the second stanza. While, moreover, it could be argued that Williams used two words instead of one to achieve the wheelbarrow shape of each stanza, such a claim does not diminish the strength of a claim about the grammatical implications—and the stylistic effects—of such a choice.

2. For expediency and clarity, I have de-formatted the poem in this representation, even though the poem retains its format when I perform these notations in class.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

In "Is a Sentence a Poem?" students are given a picture and asked individually to describe the picture in one sentence of fewer than 20 words. Afterward, the class analyzes syntax, imagery, and meaning in William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" to decide what makes it a poem. Students return to their own descriptive sentence to decide whether it is, is not, or could be a poem, justifying their reasoning. This exercise encourages students to examine an established poem while defining the characteristics of the genre of poetry and then apply this knowledge to their own work. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/sentence-poem-246.html

Edgar H. Schuster

Beyond Grammar: The Richness of English Language, or the Zero-Tolerance Approach to Rigid Rules

Effective writers—professionals and students—break traditionally taught rules frequently. So why teach students rules that writers don't actually follow?

One of the best ways to experience the richness of contemporary American nonfiction is to read the essays collected in the Houghton Mifflin *Best American Essays* series. Writers of these prize-winning essays draw on *all* the resources of the English language and frequently invent new ones. They also go "beyond grammar" frequently, though they do not violate the bedrock rules of English syntax. What they often do *not* do, however, is observe the advice and warnings commonly suggested by some style manuals, handbooks, and teachers.

The argument that one must learn the rules before one can break them has no validity if the rules to be learned are not rules in the first place.

As English teachers, we bear the responsibility of offering young writers guidance—of teaching them stylistic "rules," if you will. But as thoughtful writing teachers, we are also responsible for observing what effective writers actually do, and if that contradicts the rules we're teaching, then the rules must be overruled. Otherwise, our students will come away from our classes with misconceptions about good writing.

Through the following examples of good writing, I will illustrate that professional and student writers flout or ignore some commonly taught admonitions as they call on the rich resources of our language to express themselves with clarity and vigor. My primary interest is not simply naming the ill-advised "rules" but rather exploring *why* good writers do not follow them, and in demonstrating that there are valid reasons for breaking many of the style rules we commonly teach as unbreakable. I invite my readers to do the same.

Writerly Richness: Richard Rodriguez and an Eleventh-Grade Student

The first selection below is a paragraph from Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*; the second is the first, third, and fourth paragraphs of an essay written by an eleventh-grade student who was responding to a writing prompt in a state test. Both pieces have won high praise from English teachers, yet both violate the following admonitions:

- Avoid the passive voice.
- Avoid using forms of *be* as main verbs.
- Do not begin sentences with conjunctions.
- Do not write sentence fragments.

As you discover the violations, please ask yourself why the writers chose to express themselves as they did. After discussing each, I will present some facts about their use by good writers.

> OPEN THE DOORS OF YOUR MIND WITH BOOKS, read the red and white poster over the nun's desk in early September. It soon was apparent to me that reading was the classroom's central activity. Each course had its own book. And the information gathered from a book was unquestioned. READ TO LEARN, the sign on the wall advised in December. I privately wondered: What was the connection between reading and learning? Did one learn something by reading it? Was an idea only an idea if it could be written down? In June, CONSIDER BOOKS YOUR BEST FRIENDS. Friends? Reading was, at best, only a chore. I needed to look up whole paragraphs of words in a dictionary. Lines of type were dizzying, the eye having to move slowly across the page,

> then down, and across . . . The sentences of the first books I read were coolly impersonal. Toned hard. What most bothered me, however, was the isolation reading required. To console myself for the loneliness I'd feel when I read, I tried reading in a very soft voice. Until: "Who is doing all that talking to his neighbor?" Shortly after, remedial reading classes were arranged for me with a very old nun. (Rodriguez 63)

> Sweet sixteen. Ahhh . . . driver's license, car, new found freedom and independence. These were the words which came to my mind on my sixteenth birthday. My parents paused my jubilation though when they uttered the words they associated with sixteen years old: get a job. The sheer thought of blindly going out and talking with strangers about my future employment status was absolutely terrifying. Rejection? Let's not even go there.
>
> The first place I went into was a card shop. I smiled at the woman who gently informed me that they weren't hiring. Okay, I thought, move along. I thanked her and went on to the video store. Yes, they were looking for applicants. So I filled out an application (talk about tedious) and left my resume. I had gotten four more applications done by the time my mom came around again.
>
> About three days went by without any word, when out of the blue came a call from Loafer's, a family-owned bread company. They wanted to interview me as soon as possible. My stomach was in knots as the questions were fired at me from a lanky guy partially hidden behind a stained white apron. He seemed about as friendly as I was nervous, extremely. He told me he would call the next day. (Schuster, *Breaking* 94)

In reality, there are many good reasons for preferring the passive to the active.

Avoid the passive voice.

Strunk and White say, simply, "Use the active voice" (18). George Orwell's fourth rule of good writing is "Never use the passive where you can use the active" (481). (Any passive can be converted to an active, as far as I know.) Stephen King writes: *"You should avoid the passive tense"* (116; emphasis in original). Yet in the passages above, both the professional and the student use a passive. Compare their sentences with the active versions. Is the active or the passive the better choice?

> Passive: . . . remedial reading classes were arranged for me with a very old nun.
>
> Active: . . . the school arranged remedial reading classes for me with a very old nun.
>
> Presumably, Rodriguez wanted the "object," or receiver—"remedial reading classes"—up front, which the passive allows. Moreover, the "subject" or agent—the arranger of the change—is of no consequence here.

Let's look at the student's passive and its active revision:

> Passive: My stomach was in knots as the questions were fired at me from a lanky guy partially hidden behind a stained white apron.
>
> Active: My stomach was in knots as a lanky guy partially hidden behind a stained white apron fired the questions at me.

The active version here would require the insertion of ten words before the reader learns why the author's stomach was "in knots."

Some facts: In reality, there are many good reasons for preferring the passive to the active. A reporter on that fateful day of November 22, 1963, in Dallas wrote, "The President was shot," not "Someone shot the President," and Willy Loman's wife bemoaned, "So attention must be paid," not "So you/society must pay attention." See Joseph M. Williams's comments on the passive in *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace.* Williams maintains that "the main reason the passive exists in the language [is] to improve cohesion and emphasis" (55). This is not a consideration typically discussed in handbooks or classrooms.

The bottom line: A much better rule than "Avoid the passive" is "Regard the passive as an evil only when the active would be more effective."

Avoid using forms of *be* as main verbs.

The rationale for this admonition is that *be* is a static verb; students should hunt for more active verbs—forceful, even vivid verbs. But what do

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writers do? In the paragraph, Rodriguez uses a form of *be* (*was* or *were*) nine times, and he clearly is not seeking verbal wizardry in his other choices as a listing reveals: *read, was, was, had, was, advised, wondered, was, learn, was, written, was, look up, were, read, were, toned, bothered, was, required, feel, read, tried, arranged.*

The student uses *be* as a main verb only four times, but she too does not stretch for vividness of verbs. For instance, she uses *come* and *go* eight times.

Some facts: In a study of the verbs used in excerpts from essays by George Orwell and E. B. White, I found that Orwell used a form of *be* as a main verb 40% of the time; White, 46% of the time. In a favorite poem of mine, "Debris of Life and Mind," Wallace Stevens used *be* forms as main verbs 54.5% of the time. Or consider the following passage by Annie Dillard, describing an eclipse and its sudden ending (bold treatment is mine):

> In the sky **was** something that should not **be** there. In the black sky **was** a ring of light. It **was** a thin ring, an old, thin silver wedding band, an old, worn ring. It **was** an old wedding band in the sky, or a morsel of bone. There **were** stars. It **was** all over. (483)

The bottom line: Forms of *be* are natural, especially in descriptions. Moreover, alternatives may sound forced and artificial. Rodriguez might have written "Reading *consumed* the classroom time" rather than "Reading *was* the classroom's central activity." Would it have been an improvement?

Do not begin sentences with conjunctions.

Rodriguez wrote:

> Each course had its own book. And the information gathered from a book was unquestioned.

Why the period after *book,* and would a comma have been just as good or better? Here, it seems to me, the author wanted separate emphasis on each of the two main clauses, a desire that would have been thwarted by using a comma. At the same time, *and* cannot be deleted.

The student used *so* to open a sentence near the end of her second paragraph:

> Yes, they were looking for applicants. So I filled out an application (talk about tedious) and left my resume.

Would a comma before *so* have been better? If the sentence were in isolation, it might have been. But look at the whole paragraph. The sentence lengths are, respectively:

10, 13, 5, 10, 6, 13, 15

If she had used a comma before *so,* the lengths would have been:

10, 13, 5, 10, 19, 15

Quite a difference in rhythm, wouldn't you agree? To be sure, the student may not have been conscious of what she was doing, but good student writers often have an intuitive sense for such things, probably because they are often also good readers.

Some facts: Whatever one may think about these particular examples, the fact is that good writers have been opening sentences with conjunctions regularly, and ever since the King James Bible ("And God saw that it was good"). And probably well before that. Figure 1 describes the practices of the 54 writers in Joyce Carol Oates and Robert Atwan's anthology, *The Best American Essays of the Century.* (There are 55 writers, but Langston Hughes's essay was not considered because it is exclusively dialogue.)

In these classic essays—from Mark Twain to Saul Bellow—an average of 14.7 sentences *per essay* start with coordinating conjunctions. Were we to add sentences starting with conjunctive adverbs (*however, therefore, nevertheless*), the number would be higher still. Professional writers *rarely* use anything other than a period before conjunctive adverbs in clause-initial position, regardless of what the handbooks say (see the research on initial conjunctive adverbs in my *Breaking the Rules* 176–79).

FIGURE 1. Sentences Opening with Coordinating Conjunctions

CONJUNCTION	NUMBER OF TIMES USED
but	354
and	258
so	59
yet	45
for	44
or	26
nor	8

The bottom line: It is long past time that we ceased to deprive students of this useful device.

Do not write sentence fragments.

As pointed out from the earliest editions of *The Harbrace Handbook of English* (1941) and *Warriner's Handbook of English* (1948), the unforgiveable sins in written English are fragments and run-ons. Let's take a close look at the two passages we are considering.

Especially interesting in Rodriguez's paragraph is his creative use of sentence fragments. There are four altogether. Here are the first two, with their full-sentence alternatives. Why might Rodriguez have chosen the fragments?

> 1 FRAG: In June, CONSIDER BOOKS YOUR BEST FRIENDS.
>
> 1 SENT: In June, the poster read, CONSIDER BOOKS YOUR BEST FRIENDS.
>
> 2 FRAG: Friends?
>
> 2 SENT: Books were my friends?

The third fragment might easily have been included in the sentence that precedes it. Why did Rodriguez use a period after *impersonal,* creating a fragment?

> FRAG: The sentences were . . . coolly impersonal. Toned hard.
>
> SENT: The sentences were . . . coolly impersonal, toned hard.

Not only does "toned hard" receive great emphasis by being isolated, but Rodriguez's "coolly impersonal" gets a bit more emphasis by being placed at the end of its sentence.

The last fragment is a kind of double fragment. The "until" clause is separated from its main clause, and it has neither subject nor verb. If Rodriguez had used full sentences, he would have written the following:

> . . . I tried reading in a very soft voice, until the nun said, "Who is . . . ?"
>
> . . . I tried reading in a very soft voice. Until: "Who is . . . ?"

Clearly, all of Rodriguez's fragments are rhetorically effective. They are more *economical* than the alternative versions. They are also more *emphatic.* Notice, also, that they are *dramatic,* they draw us in, especially this last, where the reader has to supply the connection between the previous sentence and the one beginning, "Until." The reader must also determine who is speaking the quoted words.

The student's fragments are in the first, second, and penultimate "sentences" of her first paragraph. Would you agree that the alternative versions, once again, prove much less effective rhetorically?

> 1 FRAG: Sweet sixteen.
>
> 1 SENT: I was sweet sixteen.
>
> 2 FRAG: Ahhh . . . driver's license, car, new found freedom and independence.
>
> 2 SENT: Ahhh, now I would have my driver's license, a car, and new found freedom and independence.
>
> 3 FRAG: Rejection?
>
> 3 SENT: Might I experience rejection?

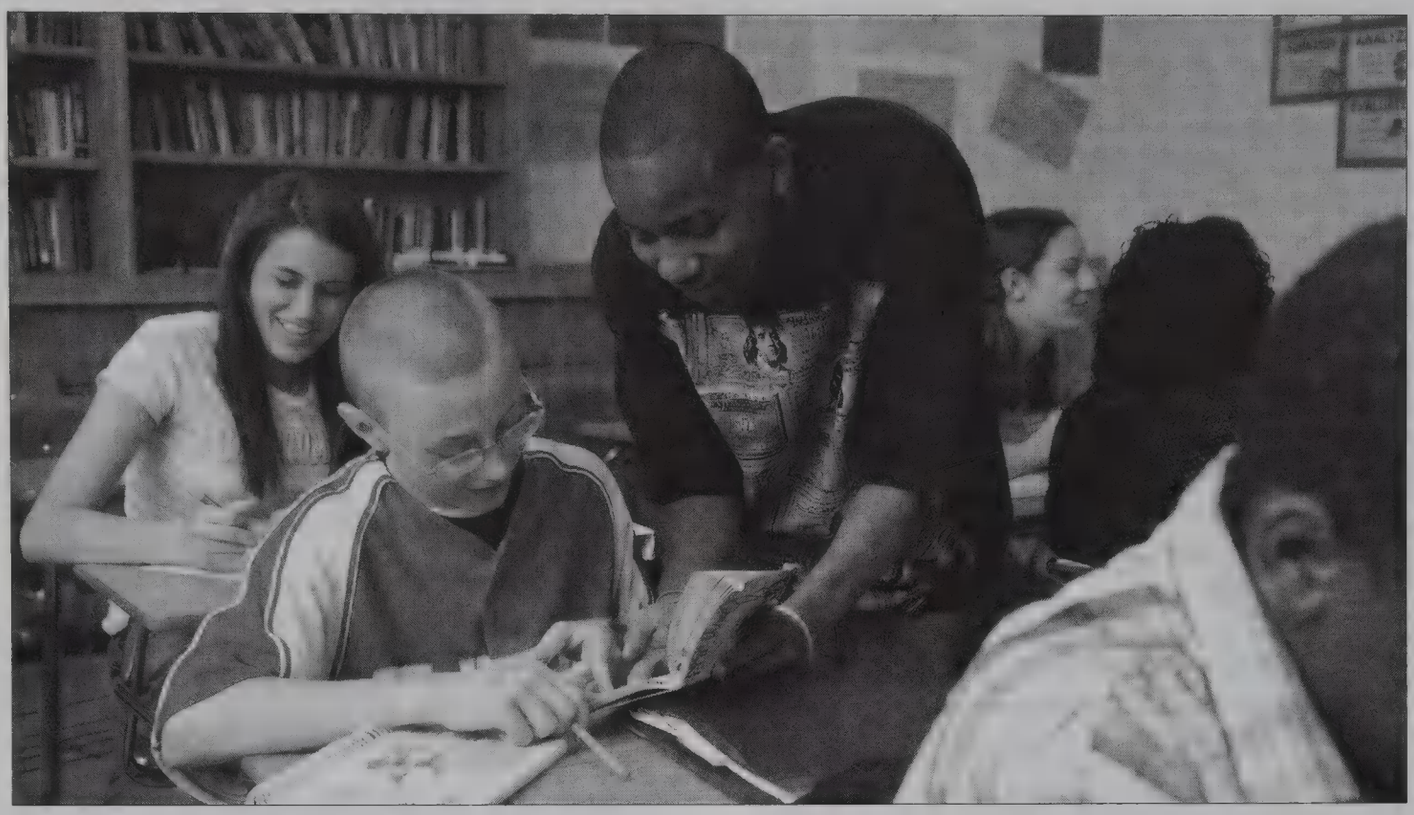
It seems to me that the full-sentence versions are pedestrian compared with the fragments. They are also wordier and less dramatic. Fragments are also often more *natural* than full sentences. This is especially true of responses to questions.

Some facts: In "A Fresh Look at Sentence Fragments," I studied the fragments from the 50 essays reprinted in *The Best American Essays of 2001* and *2003,* and I found that all but four of the essayists used at least one sentence fragment. The average per article (including those that did not use any fragments) was 10.1.

The bottom line: Fragments may create greater emphasis than full sentences. They may be more natural and more dramatic. And they are economical. If a fragment is rhetorically effective, a student should not be penalized for using it. Note: Not one of the several English teachers who read the student essay and gave it the highest grade possible in the state assessment made any remarks about the fragments. When making choices between formally grammatical sentences and rhetorically effective sentences, good writers often chose the latter.

But What about Formal English?

The Rodriguez paragraph might be considered a memoir; the student essay is a personal narrative. In both genres, authors may not be expected to write



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in "formal English." But are the standards of formal English necessarily very different from less formal? Are there stricter rules?

David Foster Wallace was among the best essay writers of our time. Here is the first paragraph of his essay introducing *The Best American Essays of 2007,* an essay that one might expect would be in a formal register. How many violations of formal admonitions can you find? My own list follows.

> I think it's unlikely that anyone is reading this as an introduction. Most of the people I know treat *Best American Essays* anthologies like Whitman Samplers. They skip around, pick and choose. There isn't the same kind of linear commitment as in a regular book. Which means that the reader has more freedom of choice, which of course is part of what this country's all about. If you're like most of us, you'll first check the table of contents for names of writers you like, and their pieces are what you'll read first. Then you'll go by title, or apparent subject, or sometimes even first line. There's a kind of triage. The guest editor's intro is last, if at all. (xii)

Wallace's Violations:

Avoid contractions. Foster uses eight in this brief paragraph.

Avoid first-person pronouns. The essay is in first person and begins with *I.*

Avoid you. You is used four times in the sixth sentence alone, again in the seventh.

Avoid expletive there. Of the nine sentences, two (22%) are *there* patterns.

Avoid informal word choices. Many people would insist on spelling out *it's* and would certainly fault the contraction of *is* in *country's. Pieces* is rather informal for *essays,* as is *intro* for *introduction*; *skip around* and *pick and choose* are relatively informal verb choices.

Vary sentence openings. All but two sentences open with *there* or the subject noun phrase. (And note that most subjects are simple pronouns.) One sentence opens with a conjunction ("Then") immediately followed by its subject. Only the sixth sentence has an unusual opening.

And here are two we have already discussed:

Avoid sentence fragments. Foster's fifth sentence is a fragment; it "should" begin with "This" rather than "Which," according to most traditional handbooks. The joining of the two fragments with a comma rather than a

semicolon would also make the "sentence" a comma splice.

Avoid be *verbs. Be* is used as a main verb **eight** times. All of Wallace's other verbs are simple and monosyllabic: *think, read, know, treat, skip, pick, choose, mean, has, check, like,* and *go.*

There it is: David Foster Wallace breaks at least eight of the "rules" typically justified by those who would teach students to write "formal" (or more likely these days, "academic") English. There will be time enough for students to learn how to write like academics when and if they become academicians. Meanwhile, let's teach them to write like writers.

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Edgar H. Schuster is the author of *Breaking the Rules: Liberating Writers through Innovative Grammar Instruction* (Heinemann, 2003) and of many other books and articles. He has been teaching English at the high school and college levels for a lifetime. Email him at edhs2@aol.com.

READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Analyzing Grammar Pet Peeves" asks students to begin by thinking about their own grammar pet peeves. They then read a Dear Abby column in which she lists several grammar pet peeves. Using a chart, students analyze each pet peeve and research it to determine its accuracy. By analyzing Dear Abby's "rant" about bad grammar usage, students become aware that attitudes about race, social class, moral and ethical character, and "proper" language use are intertwined and that the rant reveals those attitudes. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/analyzing-grammar-peeves-1091.html

Candidates Announced for Section Elections; Watch for Your Ballot

The Secondary Section Nominating Committee has named the following candidates for Section offices in the NCTE spring elections:

For Members of the Secondary Section Steering Committee (one to be elected; term to expire in 2015): **Aurelia Davila de Silva,** San Antonio, Texas; **Steven Heller,** Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire. Illinois.

For **Members of the Secondary Section Nominating Committee** (three to be elected; terms to expire in 2012): **Brandon Bolyard,** Vallivue High School, Caldwell, Idaho; **Diane Bondurant,** Tenoroc High School, Lakeland, Florida; **Walter Brown,** Caddo Parrish, Shreveport, Louisiana; **Linda Kerschner,** Conestoga High School, Berwyn, Pennsylvania; **Catherine Ross-Stroud,** Cleveland State University, Ohio; **Maja Wilson,** University of Maine, Orono.

Members of the 2010–11 Secondary Section Nominating Committee are Robert Gardner, Edina, Minnesota, chair; Calle Friesen, St. Mary's High School, Storm Lake, Iowa; and Annette Sample, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Paul Butler

Reconsidering the Teaching of Style

Focusing on cohesion, emphasis, sentence combining, imitation, and using style to generate ideas, Butler describes ways in which teachers can help students develop variety and creativity in their writing style.

Every now and then, we read something that has a powerful effect on us, making us stop, reflect, or possibly experience an unexpected emotion or insight. As readers, what is it that evokes this type of response? Conversely, when we write something ourselves, how can we make our prose elicit a similar response in readers?

If your answer to these questions involves the word *style,* then you have a sense of the topic of this article. While some have called grammar the ordinary use of language, style, by comparison, is seen as its extraordinary use. Composition scholar Richard Ohmann's definition of style as "a way of writing" is useful in that it suggests the choices writers make to achieve specific effects in their prose (135). In making those choices, a number of stylistic resources can be brought to bear that involve such things as diction, syntax, cohesion, variation, rhythm, and figures of speech, commonly divided into "tropes" (metaphor and irony are common ones) and "schemes" (parallelism, alliteration, and assonance may be ones you use with your students already).

While most teachers have a sense of a favorite writer whose style they admire, many may not know how to begin thinking about it as a teachable topic—an opportunity to help identify the conscious moves writers make and, in turn, ones students (and others) can produce in their own writing. Until fairly recently, the field of rhetoric and composition had virtually abandoned the study of style as a legitimate area in its scholarship and teaching, a move attributable to the tendency to associate stylistic study with rigidly formal aspects of grammar, usage, and mechanics. Then, about ten years ago, Robert J. Connors's article "The Erasure of the Sentence" questioned the disappearance of style and examined the validity of some of the reasons given for its disappearance. Since that 2000 article, the study of style has undergone a kind of renaissance, with numerous books and articles on its uses in composition theory and pedagogy (see Sidebar).

Teaching Style

What, then, are some of the ways that we can use style as English teachers? How can we talk with students about levels of style—low, middle, and high—and the appropriate use of, say, a colloquial style in certain kinds of writing when a high style using many figures of speech or an elevated vocabulary might be more expected? What does it mean to consider levels of style "symphonic" and to move among them in our writing, blending aspects of oral discourse or dialect in writing for different audiences? The study of style in our classrooms can help give students a glimpse into a wide range of possibilities they have for making language come alive.

Cohesion

Some of the stylistic moves we can teach students involve giving their writing more cohesion. The idea of cohesion in writing is nothing new, as we often talk with students about improving their "flow," a quality we admire when we see it done well with others. In achieving cohesion, one stylistic resource to keep in mind is what is sometimes

called the "known-new" or the "given-and-new" contract. This "contract," simply stated, suggests that writers achieve greater cohesion when old or "known" information precedes new information in a sentence. On a practical level, the principle works to achieve a kind of linking between sentences as well as an internal logic. I gave an example of the known-new contract when I ended one sentence above with "'given and new' contract" and started the next sentence with "[t]his 'contract.'" The repetition of "contract" is "new" information at the end of the first sentence that becomes known information at the start of the second. With this "contract" in mind, readers immediately know the context of the word and can easily make a connection between the two sentences.

Emphasis and Introductory Sentences

Another way style can help writers is by realizing that sentences have certain rhythms and patterns of emphasis, which, as scholar Joseph M. Williams explains in his book *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace,* generally fall at the end of a sentence. If we accept Williams's premise about emphasis, then, a few other ideas become important. First, it often helps to put short, introductory phrases at the beginning of a sentence (e.g., the "first" that starts this sentence), and, second, there are some phrases that prepare readers for the more important information that comes later in a sentence. (I just used one of those phrases, and if you guessed "there are," you're right.)

While many teachers may have heard of the term or even practiced it in school, *sentence combining* saw its heyday in the 1970s and early '80s, when some thought it should be the basis of entire first-year composition curricula.

Emphasis and Reconsidering the Passive

Williams points out another device that allows readers to control where to stress new information, and it's one we often tell students to avoid—a passive verb. Here is an excellent example (drawn from Williams) of how the passive can make a difference in emphasis and also comply with the known-new contract, involving cohesion. As you read the first sentence (1) before the two alternate sentences that follow it (2a and 2b), consider *which* pair facilitates a better understanding among readers.

> (1) Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space.
>
> (2a) The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.
>
> (2b) A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble. (Williams 57)

The first selection (2a) follows our conventional wisdom with its use of an active verb ("creates"). Notice, however, that we have to wait until the end of the sentence before the idea of a black hole is fully defined, and the sentence starts with some terms (e.g., a "dead star") that not all readers are likely to be familiar with. When we move to the next choice (2b), one of the first things many readers will notice is that it starts with a passive construction ("is created by"), and many of us have learned—and possibly taught others—that the passive is to be avoided. But take a closer look at what the passive verb achieves in this case. You may have noted that it allows the writer to use the known-new contract, thereby ending the first sentence, and beginning the second, with black holes and making them more cohesive. But in terms of emphasis, the sentence accomplishes even more. By starting with known information—the term *black holes*—the author can then go on to give an explanation, slowly unfolding the information in a way that saves the unknown term ("dead star") until close to the sentence's end and allows us to visualize it as we see that it collapses into a marble-sized point. The crux is that the passive verb here allows the writer to shift the emphasis to the right and make it more understandable for readers unfamiliar with scientific terms.

Sentence Combining

Another stylistic resource is a syntactical strategy designed to combine short, often simple sentences together to improve writing maturity—a technique known as sentence combining. While many teachers may have heard of the term or even practiced it in school, *sentence combining* saw its heyday in the 1970s and early '80s, when some thought it should be the basis of entire first-year composition curricula. Certainly, brevity is valued in writing, and an

occasional short sentence can be forceful and persuasive in composing essays. In general, however, we value variety in writing, and longer sentences can artfully combine ideas and syntax in a way that reflects a writer's maturity of thought. In the early days of sentence combining, the technique was deeply tied to Noam Chomsky's transformational grammar. Scholar John C. Mellon, in an important study, used cues, also called signals, from transformational grammar that required students to memorize or conceptualize grammatical rules as they used grammatical cues. Mellon gives the following example:

> The children clearly must have wondered SOMETHING.
>
> The bombings had orphaned the children.
>
> SOMETHING was humanly possible somehow. (T:wh)
>
> Their conquerors pretended SOMETHING. (T:infin—T:exp)
>
> Chewing gum and smiles might compensate for the losses. (T:fact)
>
> The losses were heartbreaking.
>
> They had so recently sustained the losses. (22)

In Mellon's system, the first sentence is always the main clause, and the sentences below it—indented successively one or more spaces to the right—are then embedded within that main clause. Mellon gives the following instructions for the other cues: "The capitalized word 'SOMETHING' indicates an open nominal position, repeated nouns signal relativization, and parenthetical items are abbreviated transformational directions where necessary." The resulting sentence is combined as follows:

> The children whom the bombings had orphaned clearly must have wondered how it was humanly possible for their conquerors to pretend that chewing gum and smiles might compensate for the heartbreaking losses which they had so recently sustained. (qtd. in Winterowd 374)

If teachers find this system too complex for students, they might turn to Frank O'Hare, who devised a cuing system that does not require any grammatical knowledge but relies instead on a predetermined set of combining signals. In an important article on sentence combining, Shirley K. Rose gives this example of O'Hare's cuing system from his textbook *Sentencecraft*:

> Combine each of the following sets of sentences according to the instructions in parentheses:
>
> Ryan was surprised to learn SOMETHING.
>
> No one understood SOMETHING. (THAT)
>
> His painting represented something. (WHAT)

The combined sentence reads: "Ryan was surprised to learn that no one understood what his painting represented." Whereas the examples from Mellon and O'Hare both represent a cued format, an open format, pioneered by O'Hare, eliminates signals—with the exception of the vertical placement of sentences—from sentence combining, which O'Hare says teaches students decision making and sentence emphasis. Here is an example of an open format problem from one of William Strong's textbooks:

> The car roared out of the parking lot.
>
> It was low-slung.
>
> It was fishtailing.
>
> It left an autograph.
>
> The autograph was black. (xxi–xxii)

Strong's combined sentence, "Low-slung and fishtailing, the car roared out of the parking lot, leaving a black autograph," represents just one of several possible versions. The important point, though, is that it gives writers a way to rethink how sentences can be successfully combined syntactically in a way that shows how the parts rank and relate to each other, as evidenced by their arrangement.

Using Style to Generate Ideas

A related stylistic resource is Francis Christensen's idea of generative rhetoric, which I explain and then describe using a passage from the author Joan Didion. In "A Generative Rhetoric of the Sentence," Christensen attempts to advance the possibilities of what style can do to help *generate* ideas.

Drawing on the principles of structural grammar, he works to develop stylistic maturity by starting with a main (or base) clause and adding a series of nonrestrictive sentence modifiers, which he later names *free modifiers.* Free modifiers, according to Christensen, are optional clauses (e.g., subordinate clauses or prepositional phrases) that can be added at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence and function according to a principle he calls *addition.* Addition produces a variation of the loose or running sentence (where the main idea comes first) that he names the *cumulative* sentence, which he sets in opposition to the more cumbersome periodic sentence (a type of sentence that defers the main point to the end). With the cumulative sentence, writes Christensen, "The main [base] clause, which may or may not have a sentence [free] modifier before it, advances the discussion; but the additions move backward, as in this clause, to modify the statement of the main clause or more often to explicate or exemplify it, so that the sentence has a flowing and ebbing movement, advancing to a new position and then pausing to consolidate it" (156). Thus, the idea of the direction of modification (which is often backward toward the base clause or head) is a key syntactic principle of Christensen's generative rhetoric. Besides the principles of addition and direction of movement, Christensen formulates a third principle—levels of generality or abstraction—which suggests, simply stated, that the free modifiers become more concrete the further they move away from the base clause. A fourth principle—texture—is also a feature of Christensen's generative rhetoric.

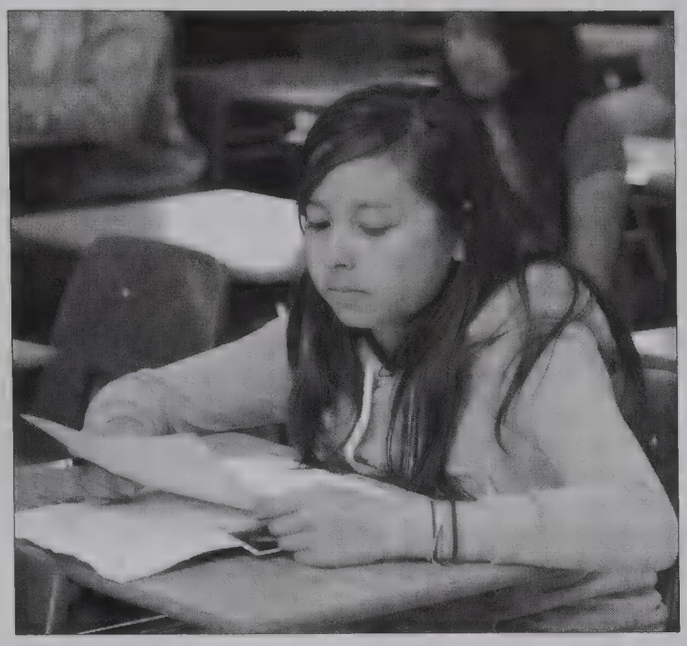
Didion's sentences show how free modifiers add detail in an "ebbing and flowing movement" and reveal one of her strategies: conveying a sense of longing for the New York where she lived when she was young.

To get an idea of Christensen's generative rhetoric at work, it is helpful to take a look at a passage from Joan Didion's "Goodbye to All That" from her collection of essays *Slouching Towards Bethlehem.* The excerpt shows not only free modifiers and cumulative sentences but illustrates a number of figures of speech that contribute to the author's overall style. At the beginning of her essay, Didion writes:

> It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the ends. I can remember now, with a clarity that makes the nerves in the back of my neck constrict, when New York began for me, but I cannot lay my finger upon the moment it ended, can never cut through the ambiguities and second starts and broken resolves to the exact place on the page where the heroine is no longer as optimistic as she once was. When I first saw New York I was twenty, and it was summertime, and I got off a DC-7 at the old Idlewild temporary terminal in a new dress which had seemed very smart in Sacramento but seemed less smart already, even in the old Idlewild temporary terminal, and the warm air smelled of mildew and some instinct, programmed by all the movies I had ever seen and all the songs I have ever heard sung and all the stories I had ever read about New York, informed me that it would never be quite the same again. (225–26)

There are several examples of Christensen's cumulative sentence here, the first of which begins with the base clause "I can remember now . . . when New York began for me." That clause is followed by two free modifiers separated by commas. Didion's sentences show how free modifiers add detail in an "ebbing and flowing movement" and reveal one of her strategies: conveying a sense of longing for the New York where she lived when she was young. Along with her use of free modifiers in the passage, Didion also employs several figures of speech in her work. For instance, she begins her essay by using antithesis ("It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the end") to juxtapose contrasting ideas and/or words. These oppositions add up to a pithy saying, and Didion adds to that idea by using ellipsis, the deliberate omission of certain words. Here, by leaving out "[i]t is" and "of things" from the second clause, Didion's concision not only pleases the ear but also forces readers to supply the (missing) connections. Furthermore, in Didion's first cumulative sentence, she breaks the normal syntactical flow of the rhythm—a scheme known as parenthesis—when she writes that she remembers "with a clarity that makes the nerves in the back of my head constrict." This use of parenthesis gives readers insight into the author's state of mind at the time she's writing the passage—a state of mind far different, we learn, from the one she enjoyed as a young woman in New York.

At least one other stylistic scheme in the Didion passage is worth examining—the author's deliberate and repeated use of the conjunction "and"



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("When I first saw New York I was twenty, and it was summertime, and I got off a DC-7 . . . and the warm air smelled of mildew"), a figure of speech known as polysyndeton. One effect of polysyndeton is to slow the rhythm or pace of prose; here, Didion uses it to produce the impression of an almost endless sense of possibility during the time she spent in New York when she was young. The "and" lends a feeling of innocence, as the experiences she had all have a certain equality and a feeling of timelessness. Less often Didion uses the opposite scheme, asyndeton, or the deliberate omission of conjunctions: "I still believed in possibilities then, still had the sense, so peculiar to New York, that something extraordinary would happen any minute, any day, any month" (229). Here, the effect of Didion's use of asyndeton ("any minute, any day, any month") is to produce a hurried rhythm, almost as though by adding each successive term she is trying to convince herself of the possibility of change.

Imitation

One stylistic resource that has been used for centuries and was frequently drawn on by classical rhetoricians is imitation. Edward P. J. Corbett advocated a form of imitation that is often used in teaching French students to write, that is, copying down verbatim something another writer has composed. While imitating by copying is a use of imitation that helps students internalize the words of others, there are other forms of imitation in which students start with the words and syntax of a writer and then transform the passage by changing the subject matter or context. In doing so, it's possible to closely study the way a writer uses syntax, diction, punctuation, sentence structure, and variation in his or her prose while actively applying the model and making it one's own. One advantage of imitation is that there are numerous models of excellent writing from which to choose, and students are able to find writers they admire and, through imitation, gain an understanding of what makes a particular writer unique. In their book *Style and Statement,* Corbett and Connors show how imitation can be used effectively with students. The following examples illustrate different ways that students might imitate the following model sentence from George Orwell's *Burmese Days*: "The gallows stood in a small yard, separate from the main grounds of the prison and overgrown with tall prickly weeds" (qtd. in Corbett and Connors 108).

> *Imitation (based on the pattern of model sentence):* The dog shivered in the background, wet from nosing his way through the early-morning grasses and covered with damp cocklespurs. (108)
>
> *Variation of the Pattern:* In a small yard, separate from the main grounds and overgrown with tall prickly weeds, stood the gallows. (110)

The first imitation follows Corbett and Connors's idea of students imitating the same "kind, number, and order" of clauses or phrases. In keeping the same general structure but changing the subject matter, the student gains a deeper understanding of the author's original intent and can transform Orwell's sentence into her own idea. In the second example, the student varies the pattern by using a periodic sentence, one that creates suspense and delays the main idea until the end of the sentence. Both examples suggest a few of the benefits of using imitation in the classroom.

Reanimating Style

These ideas just touch the surface of ways teachers can use stylistic resources in their classrooms. While many more can be offered, those discussed here might help give you an idea of ways style is still relevant in today's classroom. When students

attend to style, they discover explicit techniques that will help them in their writing. They find that some of their favorite fiction and nonfiction writers use stylistic strategies to achieve specific effects. That realization can motivate students to adopt similar stylistic moves in their own prose. With an arsenal of style knowledge from cohesion and emphasis to sentence combining, imitation, and figures of speech, students have an opportunity to reconsider what makes writing great—and compelling for readers at all levels.

RECENT WORKS ON TEACHING STYLE

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Paul Butler is assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Houston. The author of *Out of Style* (2008) and *Style in Rhetoric and Composition* (2010), Butler teaches first-year writing, advanced composition, and graduate courses in the department's PhD concentration, Rhetoric, Composition, and Pedagogy. He may be reached at pgbutler@uh.edu.

READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Exploring style in literature helps students understand how language conveys mood, images, and meaning. In "Style: Translating Stylistic Choices from Hawthorne to Hemingway and Back Again," students translate passages from one author into the style of another. They then translate fables into the style of one of the authors. Examples include passages by Ernest Hemingway and Nathaniel Hawthorne; however, passages by any author can be used. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/style-translating-stylistic-choices-210.html

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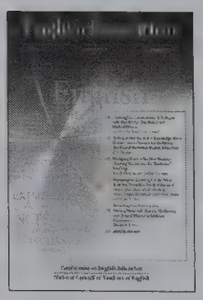

If you are a teacher educator, you'll find much of value in *English Education,* the engaging and provocative quarterly journal that keeps members of NCTE's Conference on English Education (CEE) abreast of important trends, research, and professional practices. Subscribe now to participate in lively discussions about the nature of our discipline—now and into the future! You can subscribe by visiting the NCTE Store at https://secure.ncte.org/store/ee or by calling Customer Service at 1-877-369-6283.

Mentoring Matters

The mentoring of a less-experienced colleague makes demands on the mentor but provides some tangible rewards. Occasionally mentor teachers mistakenly see the arrival of a student teacher as an opportunity for relief from teaching responsibilities; but most mentors are like Andrea Gumble, who accepts the role responsibly and discovers that she can learn much from her contributions to the development of a beginning teacher.

The job of a mentor teacher involves many roles—e.g., guide, coach, cheerleader, examiner, advisor, therapist—and each of these roles has a complex set of responsibilities and assumes layers of knowledge, proficiencies, and communication skills. Andrea Gumble distills the mentor experience into a succinct set of lessons and a useful framework for preparing for a mentor assignment.

Five Lessons Learned from My Student Teachers

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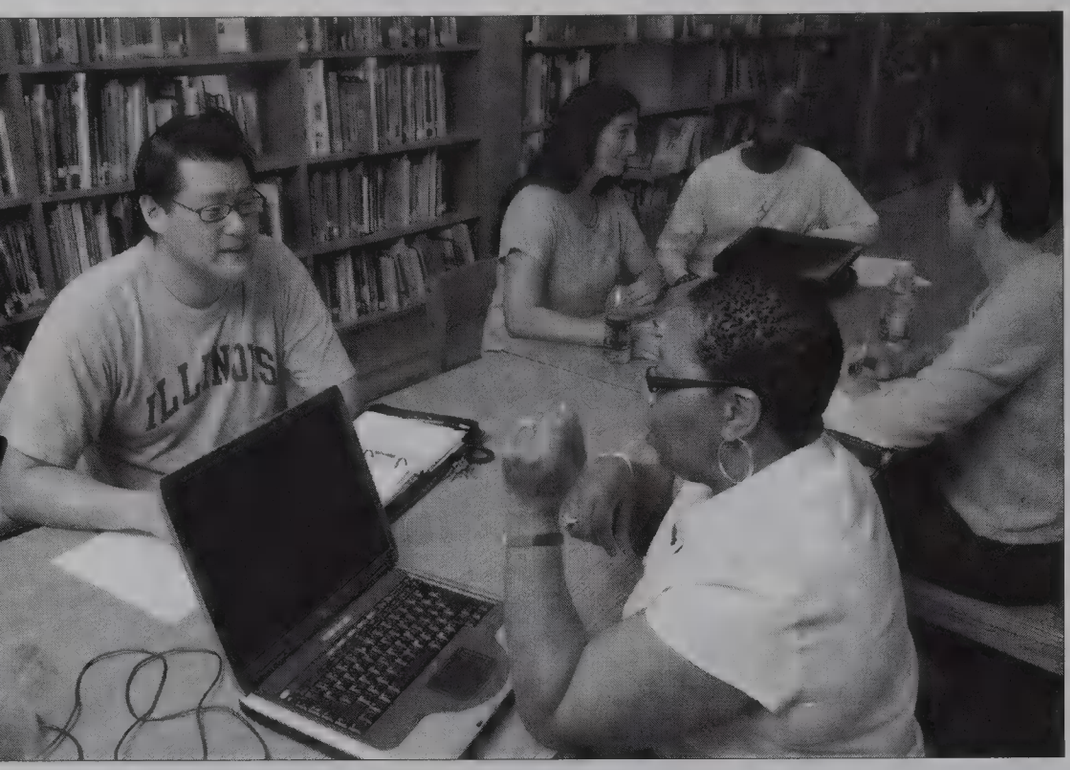
At some point in their careers, many veteran teachers consider hosting a student teacher who is completing his or her practicum for a nearby college. For many educators, the idea of mentoring a preservice teacher is exciting for their own careers since it can provide an opportunity to support a teaching candidate at an important stage in that candidate's development. For other long-time professionals, the idea of becoming a mentor teacher seems overwhelming or burdensome to their already over-packed schedules. Unfortunately, these educators may not be aware of the possibilities being a cooperating teacher can offer to the rejuvenation of what is often a long career in the same classroom.

This column provides readers with five lessons I have learned over the years as a mentor teacher to several preservice teachers. Included in my reflective thoughts are comments from two of my former protégés obtained through conversations and surveys completed during our time together. At present, Gianni is teaching high school English in a nearby school district and Carmen is a recent graduate of a local teacher education program. I offer my thoughts and those of my new colleagues as authentic viewpoints you may find useful for your own mentoring practice.

Lesson 1: Build Confidence

The most important lesson I have learned from each of my mentoring experiences is that the practical teaching opportunity I provide student teachers is often more valuable than anything they can learn from a textbook. This is because once they are in the field, they have the opportunity to develop confidence in their new roles as educators. Both Gianni and Carmen agreed that much of what they studied in their education programs centered entirely on theory. Once in the classroom, they had to test those theories they had long discussed but never had the chance or venue to implement. I have learned that mentoring means coaching, so I work hard to establish an encouraging atmosphere where my protégés can develop the confidence that will inevitably come from both their celebrations and their disappointments. Carmen was grateful for "the welcoming environment where any suggestions, questions, or problems were treated as opportunities to learn more meaningfully what it truly means to be a teacher." Gianni noted, "An important piece of advice you gave me at times was to relax!" He reported that he began to embrace the need to relax when plans inevitably fell short of expectations and he had an opportunity to learn from these experiences. As a veteran teacher I underestimated the self-assurance that comes from teaching on a daily basis.



Thompson-McClellan Photography

Working with new teachers helps me appreciate the insecurities one can bring into the classroom, so I strive to foster a personal approach to my mentoring practice. This is essential because, as Carmen suggests, "ultimately, the student teacher should be able to display in his or her subsequent teaching assignments a confidence that grew out of a successful mentor relationship."

Lesson 2: Be Patient, Flexible, and Honest

A patient mentor is an effective mentor. I have learned that it is essential to strike a balance between allowing the use of new materials my protégés bring in and creating a long-term vision of schooling for them since the inclusion of new sources can put me behind in my yearlong schedule. At the same time, I hope to avoid stifling creativity and excitement in a new educator, so I have realized that flexibility is another key component to successful mentoring. Gianni felt that "the independence and liberty to alter curriculum was a great active approach." Reorganizing or setting aside tried and true lessons can be uncomfortable, but, in the end, allowing the student teachers to have a hand in creating curriculum is an essential part of mentoring. It provides a real learning opportunity for both of us.

Being patient and flexible also means realizing not every lesson will go smoothly and being honest about why it didn't. Recognizing that new teachers will likely be nervous to perform successfully each day, I assure my protégés that some lessons will fall short. This recognition is essential to building their confidence. Carmen appreciated "the awareness that problems would occur, so we should both expect them and embrace them." For me, successful mentoring means having candid discussions about teaching, often stemming from a plan that looked good on paper but didn't work in the classroom.

Lesson 3: Listen and Learn

An excellent benefit to hosting a student teacher is the professional conversations I have with my protégés. I am always amazed at how much I learn about myself when I listen to what my student teacher thinks about my teaching style, see myself through someone else's eyes, and reflect on the new ideas my protégés present to me. Carmen believed, "You always look for creative angles in a lesson, thereby presenting new material to students in a fresh and engaging manner." Her comments inspired me, when I felt I had taught a particular lesson one too many times, to rethink my strategy and use current media that she had introduced to me. I was able to enhance my lessons with visual materials that I hadn't known about or thought of before.

From his observations of my teaching, Gianni realized that "a teacher needs to be ready to adapt and change in order to facilitate discussion, direction, and classroom activities—no one single class can be taught the exact same way as the previous one." He helped me become more aware of the adaptations I was making so I could more readily see their impact on students' learning and be more purposeful in my actions. His insight helped me create new lessons that would better serve the individual needs of my students. Overall, listening to feedback

from my protégés has helped me become a better teacher.

Lesson 4: Be Ready for Extra Work

Though some veteran teachers might believe that having a protégé will afford them the opportunity to have extra time to plan, grade, or enjoy one more cup of coffee in the teachers' lounge, being a mentor teacher is hard work and time-consuming. In addition to taking time to discuss lessons, I found myself also educating student teachers in the myriad responsibilities an educator has: deciding how to remediate students at several skill levels; reviewing IEPs and collaborating with special education teachers; demonstrating how to enter grades into the school's database; and discussing how to establish communications with parents and other colleagues. My responsibilities as a mentor teacher often required me to keep in contact with my protégés on the weekends, assuring that a plan or a situation would work out all right.

I have begun the practice of keeping a journal with each new mentoring experience. This allows me to reflect on the practice of teaching as a whole and sort through issues that arise during my time with a student teacher. Consequently, I have found trends common among all my protégés. Themes such as balancing a work load and coursework, establishing a vision of schooling, and dealing with disruptive students are some examples of issues with which I will likely deal with any student teacher. Though journaling requires more work on my part, the effort pays off because the written reflections help me clarify my thinking to better solve problems and communicate with my student teachers more effectively.

Lesson 5: Embrace the Experience

Embracing the role of a mentor teacher is a fundamental part of providing a successful experience for a student teacher. Although uncomfortable at first with turning over classroom leadership to a novice, I have come to appreciate that once the new educator steps in, the class dynamics will change entirely, which is not necessarily bad. This release was a challenge for me early on because I felt tied to the curriculum I had created and connected to the students I was teaching. But, once again, I realize that mentoring is like coaching: I am "on the sidelines," watching and guiding, letting the new teachers "get in the game" so that they, too, can embrace the entire experience. Today, I team-teach with my protégés days after they arrive, including them in class discussions so they begin to establish themselves with my classes from the start. I believe that this strategy empowers my protégés and builds confidence more quickly. Gianni agrees: "The quick transition from observing to teaching in the classroom proved extraordinarily effective." I realize now that student teachers can add an important dimension to the atmosphere and pace of my classes, energizing both me and my students with new ideas and a fresh passion for teaching. As a result, I have grown to appreciate my role as a mentor teacher as much as I cherish my role as a classroom instructor.

Opening the Door to Student Teachers

In reflecting on these lessons, I realize that the benefits of working with a student teacher far outweigh the reasons why a veteran teacher may choose to keep his or her door closed. I have learned the art of modeling patience, versatility, and authenticity—qualities I believe are needed to be an effective educator. I have become a better listener by working with student teachers, hearing questions my students might never ask, and gaining insight to challenge and become more confident with my vision of schooling. In the end, embracing the journey with each new protégé provides true learning opportunities for everyone involved; it is an experience I highly recommend for every veteran teacher.

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Jonathan Bush and Leah A. Zuidema, Editors

Professional Writing in the English Classroom

Beyond Language: The Grammar of Document Design

As teachers of writing, we know that choices matter: the more choices we can give our students, the better their writing will be—and the better writers they'll become. Many of us design our courses as writing workshops, so that students make choices about the genres they compose in. We structure writing assignments so that students make choices about topics and organization. We teach students to make choices about sentence structure, syntax, diction, and style. We resist teaching models such as five-paragraph themes and so-called power writing, which micromanage decisions and deprive students of the opportunity to learn by making authentic choices about their writing. Choices matter for student writers.

In our last column, we emphasized how professional writing instruction can prompt student writers to make genre choices in context. This time, we focus on another set of choices for students learning about professional writing: document design decisions, including choices about page layout, fonts, color, and the like. We can hear some of you objecting already. "Design?" you ask. "What does that have to do with teaching English? I'm a *language* arts teacher, not an art teacher!" We understand the skepticism, because you raise an issue that we at one time had to work through ourselves. But hear us out as we explain why design matters to your students and why design is within our purview as English teachers.

Design Matters in the English Language Arts Classroom

Design matters to student writers because in reality, student writers already make design decisions all the time. It's true that for academic writing, most students simply default to the design templates imposed on them by teachers (usually some variation on the theme of one-inch margins; double-spaced text in a plain, black, twelve-point font; name, date, and course in the top corner; centered title; etc.). But we all know students who break teachers' design rules, whether to express their personality in a curliqued or daggered font or to give the appearance of having met a length requirement by playing with margins, fonts, and spacing. These choices have consequences, for better or for worse.

Teen writers also experiment with design as they write documents that are important to their lives within and beyond school—in everyday texts such as notes to teachers, work supervisors, and parents, as well as in special occasion writing such as college application essays, flyers promoting concerts and events, materials for clubs and student council, fundraising letters, and more. Some of the design choices students make in these writings are high-stakes decisions. For example, in their everyday writing, teens need to understand that adults might read a note that is written or typed entirely in capital letters and assume, based on that design choice, that the writer was overly hasty or even "shouting" in anger. Design also matters in gatekeeping situations such as applications for college and for jobs. When young people submit résumés to apply for jobs, they want their writing noticed, and in a positive way. A blasé or cluttered design may result in potential employers skimming through the résumé and overlooking important information about the applicant's qualifications; a design that calls attention to itself rather than the content (perhaps by being too "cute" or unconventional) may be a distraction and convey the mes-

sage that the applicant is not a mature or serious worker who will play by the rules. Good design is part of what makes professional writing successful.

Design clearly matters for young writers. But is teaching design the responsibility of English teachers? Absolutely. As English language arts teachers, we are experts in interpreting and composing texts; we are language lovers and admirers of words. Not only do words matter, but so can the ways that they are arranged and presented. How a document looks can be as important as what it actually says and how it is written. Poor design may result in our writing being misunderstood, misinterpreted, or even ignored—as when Leah recently deleted an important personal email without reading it because the design led her to believe that it was spam!

But is teaching design the responsibility of English teachers? Absolutely.

We're not saying that text doesn't matter. What we are saying is that design can be an important part of writing and that if we are going to teach our students genres that use visual means of display, we should teach design as a rhetorical skill and a process that includes writerly decisions about audience, context, and genre. The decisions an author makes about how a page looks can be as important as the text the document contains. Great text + weak design and weak text + great design will both have the same effect: a document that doesn't achieve its goals. In an era when the medium is the message, we as lovers of language must also become expert in every aspect of how words are composed, delivered, and read, including design. As concepts of literacy evolve, and the possibilities for expressing literacy seem to continuously advance, so must our concept of what we teach about writing. We neglect a crucial aspect of educating student writers if we simply consider design a lower order concern, or an issue that can be solved by templates.

The Grammar of Design

Knowing *that* we need to teach document design is one thing; knowing *how* to teach it is another. Good instruction in design has an important parallel to good teaching about the textual aspects of writing: it helps writers to attend to the rhetorical scene (genre, audience, purpose, and situation) while also teaching them to make the practical decisions, big and small, that bring their rhetorical view of the writing task to life. We could say that good writing instruction offers writers both a *rhetoric* and a *grammar*: a way of seeing the big picture while also working out the details. We wrote at length in our last column about how to help writers think rhetorically about genre, audience, purpose, and situation, so we won't belabor that point here. Instead, our attention is on expanding the idea of what it means to teach grammar in the writing class.

We often think of grammar in terms of words, sentences, and paragraphs. We understand *grammar* as the rules and conventions (and explanations thereof) that enable all of these language components to function together systematically and creatively. In addition to teaching the rules and conventions of language, we can also teach rules and conventions for how language is displayed on the page and screen. In short, we can teach the grammar of design.

This idea is not so new-fangled as it might seem; it actually has roots in well-established approaches to grammar. In his classic book for teachers, *Image Grammar: Using Grammatical Structures to Teach Writing,* Harry Noden argues that grammar contains the "brushstrokes" of writing. Just as an artist uses skills, rules, and the knowledge of when to break or bend rules for effect, so do writers have the ability to do the same with text (Noden 1). And, we would add, the reverse is also true: Just as the text in writing is subject to rules, techniques, and rhetorical decisions, so is page design. The look of a page, the visual grammar, requires the same types of rhetorical, writerly decisions that the writer makes when producing, revising, and polishing writing.

A Visual Grammar Primer for Teachers

Whether we teach the grammar of language or of design, we don't teach new concepts for their own sake, as knowledge that students can show off in the vacuum of a test. Rather, we teach with practical goals in mind. When we introduce new terms, we do so in order that we and our students can share a common vocabulary that allows us to describe what we notice in the texts we work with as readers and writers.

In teaching design grammar, that common vocabulary can start with a very short list. Students can

quickly understand a great deal about design if they notice that writers' choices are in large part tied to these four techniques:

- Contrast: distinctions in size, shape, color, style, position, etc.
- Repetition: recurrences or similarities in size, shape, color, style, position, etc.
- Alignment: placement of elements so that their borders or centers create a line on the page
- Proximity: placement of elements near to one another

The CRAP acronym, which we borrow from Saul Greenberg (who in turn borrowed the principles from *The Non-Designer's Design Book* by Robin Williams [13]) never fails to get students' attention. We could scramble the word order, but this version is memorable for students—not only because it falls outside of what is usually accepted as classroom language, but also because it relies on punning to make a point: "If you don't want your writing to look awful, you have to learn to manage your contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity." The goal is for students to understand how these elements can be controlled to draw readers' attention to particular aspects of the writing.

One of the interesting things in teaching and learning about design grammar is realizing just how endemic it is in all communication. Students have told us that, because they learned design grammar, they can never again look at another billboard (or flyer, bumper sticker, book cover, sign, menu, or advertisement) without thinking about the authors' design choices and what they mean for readers. Document design is an important element even in genres we wouldn't normally consider to be visually oriented. Take, for example, how *English Journal* uses these principles—all conscious rhetorical decisions by editor Ken Lindblom and the *EJ* staff to use visual grammar to reach readers:

Students have told us that, because they learned design grammar, they can never again look at another billboard (or flyer, bumper sticker, book cover, sign, menu, or advertisement) without thinking about the authors' design choices.

- Contrast: The body of the article is printed in an unenhanced serif font, but pull-out quotes use a boldfaced sans-serif font and are set off with a vertical line. This contrast for the pull-outs emphasizes key ideas and creates eye-catching visual elements that grab the attention of casual readers.
- Repetition: The same sans-serif font used for the pull-out quotes is also used (though in a variety of contrasting sizes) for the author's name and affiliation, subtitles, and page titles.
- Alignment: The articles use a standard two- or three-column design that is full-justified, with text filling the entire column. This creates a tidiness in the text that mirrors that of a newspaper.
- Proximity: The title is separated from other elements and creates emphasis and internal unity—focusing attention solely on the title.

Writers also need to know to break the rules for effect. Much as we teach our students to rhetorically employ the use of fragments, run-ons, or other nonstandard textual elements to add effect to their writing, so can they create effect with visual grammar. Even in *English Journal,* which employs a relatively conservative design, we can see some visual principles broken for effect. Most notable of these is how the pull-out quotes in feature articles break the alignment and jut into the margins. Another is how the author's name, the article title, and the summary are indented to the left and then left justified. Both of these choices add effect through contrast and give the journal a slight avant-garde look. Taken all together, the design choices for *EJ* give the journal a sense of unity—a professional design that shows it is a journal by professionals, for professionals. At the same time, in contrast to a medical journal, it has a visual accessibility and friendliness to it that correspond to the values of our profession. Yes, visual grammar does matter and can have a great effect not only on what our text says but also how the messages are perceived.

Teaching Visual Grammar to Students

These design choices are not unlike the types of choices we make when we decide to use a semicolon, or a comma, or any other textual element in our writing that adds effect. The teaching of page design and visual grammar—as a rhetorical skill—isn't much different from any other skill we typically teach our students. We still teach

students to guide their writing to a specific audience, within specific genres and purposes. We are just introducing a new tool—a visual "brush stroke" for our students to add to their writing repertoire.

When teaching visual grammar, we follow the same types of processes we use with other writing skills. For example:

- **Modeling:** We examine multiple examples of visual designs—both within and across genres. In Jonathan's college developmental writing classes, his students begin the semester with a flyer analysis project. Their first task is to collect both good and bad examples of organizational recruitment flyers from around campus. Without yet knowing the elements of CRAP, students analyze what traits make them effective or ineffective, particularly in relation to the audiences and purposes of the flyers. This becomes an entryway not only into design but also into learning about the rhetorical nature of all writing.
- **Guided Practice:** In her ugly syllabus project, Leah's students begin with an unformatted set of information for a course syllabus. Using their knowledge as experienced readers and consumers of syllabi, they design and create a version of how the syllabus should look. In doing so, they make rhetorical decisions about design and consider how that design affects the ability of the reader to access information appropriately—while also becoming familiar with the contents of the syllabus.
- **Reflection:** We have students create reflective pieces on how their design decisions reflect their rhetorical understanding. In Jonathan's classes, the students write a fictional memo or email back to the flyer's creators, with an improved version attached, describing how the new version is more appropriate for the purpose and context of the flyer. Leah has a contest where students argue for and vote on the best design for the new syllabus and has students use rhetorical principles as criteria. Both make the rhetorical nature of the design grammar visible and meaningful.

In this column, we've offered an introduction to the ideas of page design—a visual grammar. We hope this inspires you to continue to use models, guided practice, and reflection to expand the opportunities for writing and analysis for you and your students. If you already use elements of visual grammar in your classrooms, or find yourself inspired to try something new, focusing on page design, we'd love to hear from you. Please drop us a line at lzuidema@dordt.edu or jbush@wmich.edu.

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RESOURCES ON TEACHING VISUAL GRAMMAR

Williams, Robin. *The Non-Designer's Design Book.* 3rd ed. Berkeley: Peachpit, 2008. Print.

This is one of our favorite books on page design. Not only is it easy to read and well organized, but, just as its title suggests, it is written as a guide for non-designers. Teachers will find it extremely useful as a resource, not only for themselves but for their students, too. Williams also has an accompanying Web-design book.

Wysocki, Anne Frances, and Dennis A. Lynch. *Compose, Design, Advocate.* New York: Longman, 2006. Print.

This college first-year writing text is an excellent resource for teachers at all levels. The assignments in it can be translated into effective high school projects. The focus on advocacy gives a purpose for design writing.

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Research for the Classroom

The Power of Reflective Writing

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For some students, self-examination occurs only when they look into a mirror. The mirror offers reflections that reveal students' unique physical qualities and presents opportunities for students to consider and address areas of need. Similarly, structured opportunities for reflective writing allow students to polish their writings and to reflect actively on their written creations, while encouraging clearer and more honest writing products. In addition, the use of reflective writing can transform students as they begin to incorporate metacognition, or thinking about their thinking, into their writing processes as they simultaneously learn the curriculum.

Although reflective writing allows students to engage authentically in the writing process, pressures toward step-by-step approaches to writing and a one-size-fits-all English language arts curriculum may prevent many students from participating in authentic reflection about their processes of writing as well as their written products.

In past years, I have tried, unsuccessfully, to address this dilemma. Although I have incorporated traditionally structured writing activities and semester-long portfolios into my classroom instruction, I have observed two reoccurring phenomena: First, my students often include in their portfolios the five writing pieces that have earned them the highest grades. Second, when asked to reflect on the writings that they include in their end-of-semester portfolios, students tend to provide brief, superficial explanations for their portfolio selections, such as "I earned an A on this piece" or "This piece is the longest piece I have written."

As I considered these observations, I decided to implement a mixed-methods action research project during the first few weeks of school. Through a reflective writing activity designed to complement my ninth-grade students' first major writing activity of the school year, I intended to achieve three goals: (1) to help students become writers who examined their writing more deeply; (2) to connect the students to their writing and create a sense of ownership through the process of reflection; and (3) to create a *productive problem* for students stemming from a *surplus* of high-quality pieces that would result from the process of reflection and from which students could choose for inclusion in their writing portfolios.

To encourage the metacognition necessary to support authentic reflection, I introduced two components into student portfolios: Initial Reflection Letters and After Writing Reflection Letters. I hoped that these letters would improve the students' ability to reflect on their writing pieces and provide them with opportunities to examine their engagement with the writing process.

I predicted that the combination of letters would help students to reflect on *each* written piece they produced throughout the semester, instead of reflecting only on the five pieces that they selected for their end-of-semester portfolios. My intention was to encourage students to reflect on the various elements of their papers by responding to standards-based, student-focused questions. The reflection letters capitalize on the fact that these portfolios require students to select their own portfolio pieces rather than having the teacher determine portfolio contents.

I introduced the action research project during our unit study of short stories. As I prepared to present the requirements of the Initial Reflection Letters to my

students, I braced for some opposition. I feared that the students would view the reflective components as extra work. I also worried about the level of honesty and trust that students would display in their Initial Reflection Letters. I wondered if they would be willing to admit what they did not know about writing and literature, since we had met just one week earlier when the school year had begun.

Surprisingly, students did not complain when I introduced the purposes of the reflective pieces. They seemed willing to take a "leap of faith."

Surprisingly, students did not complain when I introduced the purposes of the reflective pieces. They seemed willing to take a "leap of faith." And, to my delight, their enthusiasm did not wane over the next five weeks.

Getting Ready

To begin the short-story unit, I read *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (Houghton, 1984) by Chris Van Allsburg with each class. I used this work to inspire my students to craft rough drafts of their own creative writing. *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* is a virtually textless picture book that contains 14 illustrations, titles, and captions.

After sharing the story with my students, I invited each student to select a picture. Students used these pictures to draft an original story that they worked on throughout the unit. To ensure that the pieces accurately reflected the interpretations of each student, I omitted requirements with respect to length and literary elements.

Once the students completed their rough drafts, I invited them to participate in a peer-editing activity designed to connect with their Initial Reflection Letters. During this activity, students commented on what they liked, what they disliked, and what they found confusing about their classmates' papers. As students drafted the Initial Reflection Letters, which were addressed to me, they reflected on which suggestions they chose to incorporate into the next draft of the creative writing piece. As a result, students began to view the processes of peer review and reflection as important, concrete parts of the writing process.

Each of my students submitted an Initial Reflection Letter and a creative writing rough draft within the first week of the unit. The Initial Reflection Letter allowed me to assess students' writing skills, and the creative writing rough draft encouraged each student to produce a piece of creative writing that he or she could discuss, revise, and reflect on to build the student's understandings of short-story literary devices.

As I guided my students through the Initial Reflection Letters, I prompted them with standards-based, student-friendly questions. I derived these questions from the NCTE/IRA Standards for the Language Arts and specifically addressed the notions that students ought to participate in literary communities and that students ought to communicate their literary discoveries in ways that suit their purposes and audiences. Question prompts included the following:

1. Did the peer editing activity help you? If so, please explain how the activity helped you—if not, please explain why the activity was not helpful.
2. How do you feel about the progress of your rough draft? Do you anticipate that you will need to revise again?
3. What do you like best about your written piece? What are you most concerned about?
4. What literary devices have you incorporated so far? Please include specific examples from your creative writing. If you have chosen not to include any literary devices, please explain why you have chosen not to include any devices.

In the Initial Reflection Letter, some students offered textbook definitions of the literary devices but could not identify the specific devices in their own stories. Since we had not yet begun our study of literary devices, I was able to assess which students possessed more advanced understandings of literary devices through their initial analyses of their writings. "I believe that my writing does demonstrate I understand narrative writing," shared one student, "I did not use first person but third person point of view. I was able to see into the minds of all my characters in my story if I wanted to."

Despite the fact that some students wrote that they did not have *any* understanding of literary devices, each student crafted a rough draft for *The Mysteries of*

Harris Burdick creative writing activity.

After reading students' Initial Reflection Letters and creative writing rough drafts, I offered individualized comments to each student during brief, informal conferences, and I also distributed a generalized letter with formal observations about the rough drafts and the content of the written pieces (e.g., conventions, sentence structures, use of literary devices). I also reminded my students that the goals of *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* writing activity were to explore literary devices in short stories and to reflect on the writing itself.

After writing the Initial Reflection letters, students studied various short-story literary devices during the last four weeks of the unit. As students gained familiarity with devices such as mood, tone, and foreshadowing, they decided whether or not to incorporate the device into their creative writing pieces. Once their creative writing pieces were complete, students composed After Writing Reflection Letters.

Results and Implications

Many of the After Writing Reflection Letters demonstrated that students engaged in reflection as students engaged in "creative and critical uses of their knowledge and skills" (Langer 12). As one student wrote in her After Writing Reflection Letter:

> During the process of writing this, I enjoyed when we were given choices for the topic. I choose to use a few suggestions. I put some active and passive voice in my paper, and [learned] to make a new paragraph each time I am using dialogue. Another thing that I chose to think about is that I am the only one that can tell my story. When I first thought about writing this paper, I thought it would be boring. I don't really like to write, but after putting some thought into this paper, I think that it is not too bad. I enjoyed writing this!

When I pulled out the student's Initial Reflection Letter, she smiled, pleased with her growth as a writer. She observed that her Initial Reflection Letter lacked authentic, intrinsic reflection. She explained that she wrote her rough draft hoping to earn a certain grade and—therefore—composed that rough draft consistent with what she thought I wanted her to write. Although she liked parts of her writing, her Initial Reflection Letter revealed concern about her grade: "I like the fact that my paper is [about] young love, but at the same time it is mysterious," the student had written, "but I am concerned that I will get a result back after I turn it in and it will basically tell me to start over." During our final discussion, she explained that she felt empowered by the reflective writing activities because she could explain her understanding of literary devices in her own words and, as a result, was much less focused on her grade.

An analysis of the Initial Reflection Letters, the After Writing Reflection Letters, and in-class discussions showed that many students experienced an increase in specific knowledge about literary devices as demonstrated on the unit assessment. Quantitatively, this year's classes scored 36.7% higher on the unit assessment. The standards-based unit assessment contains many multiple-choice questions about short-story writing, literary devices, and why authors choose to use certain literary devices. The increase of scores on the unit assessment demonstrated that students could identify literary devices in a variety of contexts better than students in the previous year. In addition, the scores on the final written pieces averaged eleven points higher than the scores from previous years. This result suggests that students used their understandings of literary devices to craft creative writing.

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Qualitative data showed that students expressed increased engagement in their writings. Through informal conferences and classroom discussions, students indicated that they were encouraged by the process of reflection during the writing process. This is evident in the following excerpt from one student's After Writing Reflection Letter:

> This assignment has been really great. I really enjoyed writing my story. At first, I thought this was just going to be another boring, keep us busy project, but I was proved wrong. I am glad I stuck

with writing as much as I did. I just started going and I could not stop. I felt very open. I liked the rough draft part because it is like the middle stage. People can mess up and make it better before they turn in a final draft.

As a result of the positive feedback provided by the students during *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* creative writing assignment, I continue to design writing assignments that incorporate Initial Reflection Letters and After Writing Reflection Letters. One year after conducting my initial research, I find myself continuously inspired by a student who, after hanging back in the classroom once her peers had fled on a Friday afternoon, offered the highest of compliments: "Thanks for the great assignment." And as my students continue to reflect on their own writings throughout the year, I challenge students to examine their reflections, appreciate their unique features, and see the beauty of their written images.

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Canning

Jars upon jars, words upon words
Cucumbers upon cucumbers

Waiting to be changed from
What was and would not last
To what may last, for a while.

Jars lined upon a cool shelf
Stacked, wiped clean
And labeled Sweet Dill

Like words waiting in chaos
To be gathered, washed, arranged
Sentences split open,
Bits and ends sliced off
Meaning stuffed into form
To offer nourishment beyond the season
Against the coming cold and dark.

—Krista Stevens

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Krista Stevens is the English supervisor in Stoneham, Massachusetts, and writes a monthly column for the magazine *The Covenant Companion.* "A few years ago, I showed my husband a poem I had written for him. Our children asked him why he didn't write poems for me. 'Your mother writes because she can,' he replied cryptically and returned to his garden." She may be reached at Krista.Stevens@verizon.net.

Teaching Young Adult Literature

This One's for You, Jan Brady: Learning from the Outcasts

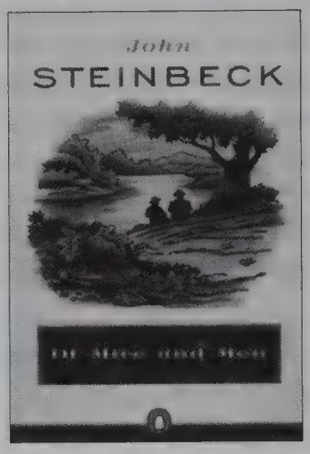
Outcasts.

They've been a part of pop culture for as long as pop culture itself.

Veteran teachers probably remember watching Jan Brady struggle to find herself in the shadow of "Marsha! Marsha! Marsha!" Those of us with a decade or so of experience saw Screech fail week after week to garner Lisa Turtle's affection. And the newest teachers out there surely will recognize and appreciate what Napoleon Dynamite and McLovin had to endure.

Unfortunately, being an outcast extends well beyond a television or movie set. For many teens, it's part of their daily lives.

That's why it's so important to teach novels that center on outcast characters. More than ever, today's teens need books that both speak to and challenge them in meaningful *and lasting* ways. And books such as *Of Mice and Men, Stuck in Neutral,* and *American Born Chinese* do just that. They not only connect with students on the fringe but they also confront the mainstream to learn a little about themselves as well.



Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (Grades 9–12)

This tragic novel follows migrant workers George Milton and Lennie Small as they search for work during the Great Depression. Their friendship is strong, and each provides the other with much-needed companionship. But when mentally challenged Lennie accidentally murders the boss's daughter-in-law, George is faced with the ultimate decision.

It's one thing to think about the issues in a book; it's another to make those issues personal.

Prior to handing out the novel, I guide students through a series of anticipatory questions related not only to the novel but also to life itself (see fig. 1). It's one thing to think about the issues in a book; it's another to make those issues personal—not to mention discussing them. By doing this, students connect to relevant issues *prior* to their actual reading. This approach gets them immediately engaged in the learning process and gives them concepts to think about when they do eventually get to the reading. And because of its brevity, hooking the students early is essential to the novel's success.

Once the novel has been handed out (and everyone has stopped talking about how skinny it is!), I ask students to take out a pencil and a blank sheet of paper. With pencils in hand, I ask them to draw the scene that I am about to describe, including as many details as possible. I then read the first three paragraphs, and there is *a lot* of description in that passage. There's so much, in fact, that students won't be able to get it all. Depending on time, I often read it aloud again, allowing them to expand on or include some missing details. Once finished, we compare pictures. Rather than dissecting the artistic value of each (which some students will), I elect to focus on Steinbeck's use of imagery by comparing and discussing common images drawn by the students. I also give students

FIGURE 1. *Of Mice and Men*: "I Get By with a Little Help from My Friends"

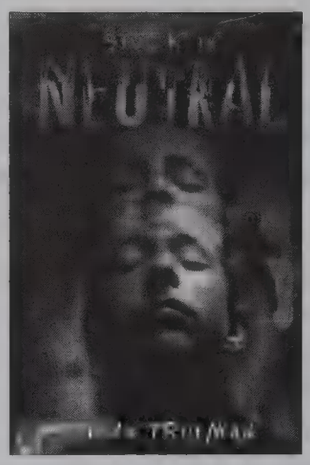
1. Discuss why it is important to have positive personal relationships.
2. Identify the different reasons why people might be considered outcasts in society.
3. If you were made an outcast, how do you think you'd react? How would you deal with your situation?
4. What can be done to help stop people from being isolated from society?
5. Give an example of a situation in life where the "right" thing to do is the hardest thing to do.

the chance to make predictions by asking the simple question, "Why do you think he spends so much time describing this one place?" And beyond the academic merits of the assignment, this activity, like the anticipatory questions, serves as another simple way to get everyone actively engaged early in the story.

A few days into the novel, I set aside time for students to prepare a two-minute presentation on a topic related to one of the characters. Again, because of how quickly we read the story, an assignment like this connects students with what is being read in a relevant and personal way. I allow them to work in pairs, and I put no restrictions on the assignment other than it must somehow connect to a character. Generally, I get several PowerPoint presentations or posters on racism, the Great Depression, and the treatment of the mentally challenged, but be prepared: you will have a student or two bring in a rabbit or a mouse. And that's OK, because by doing so, that student has made a personal connection with the text that he or she might otherwise have missed. Keep in mind that it's often through strange connections like these that the most meaningful learning takes place.

On finishing the novel, students are generally left with a "Wait, are you serious?" reaction to the abrupt ending. Feeding on this lack of closure, my final assignment has students create what I call "The Real Last Chapter." For this, they write a two-page conversation between George and Slim as they walk away from the final scene. This is a great chance for students to not only work on dialogue-writing skills, but it also gives them an opportunity to wrap up an otherwise open ending in a way they deem fitting.

Finally, just a heads-up that this is a tough read for kids, and they often take the ending pretty hard. To lighten things up, after everyone has turned in "The Real Last Chapter," I show the *Saturday Night Live* skit featuring James Franco that portrays an alternative ending to the story. Students love it, and it helps them feel a bit better about the ending. It can be found on Hulu at http://www.hulu.com/watch/35498/Saturday-night-live-george-and-lenny.



Stuck in Neutral by Terry Trueman (Grades 7–10)

Fourteen-year-old Shawn McDaniel loves his family, likes girls, and enjoys music. He's pretty much an average teenager except for two things. First, he's a genius. He remembers everything he has ever seen, heard, or read. And second, he has severe cerebral palsy, and as a result, he can't communicate with the outside world. The good news is Shawn has learned to accept his condition. The bad news is his father is considering killing Shawn to end his tormented life, and there's nothing Shawn can do to stop him.

Prior to starting the novel, I hold up a series of signs giving insight into Shawn's circumstance (reminiscent of the old Bob Dylan video at http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6392396693800156397#), but you could use PowerPoint slides just as easily. I am completely silent as I do this, and I ask the students to remain silent as well. For the next 30 seconds, students simply read the signs as I flip through them (see fig. 2). By the time the last sign hits the floor, the feeling in the room usually is, to quote one student, "Totally freaky!"

FIGURE 2. *Stuck in Neutral;* "What If . . ."

Each line below is held up on a separate sign in front of the class:

What if you were a genius?

And what if you could remember everything you saw and heard?

What would you do with your abilities?

Now think about this . . .

What if you were unable to speak?

Or walk?

Or dress yourself?

Or feed yourself?

Or bathe, clean, or take care of yourself in any way?

Would this change who you are?

How about this . . .

What if your dad were considering killing you to "help" you?

What would you do then?

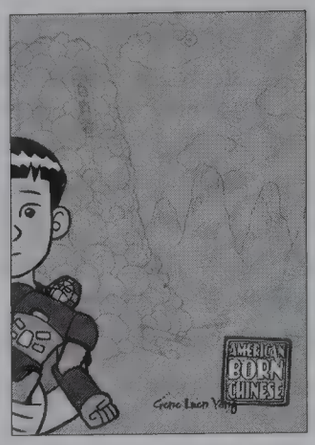
Not only does this get students' attention, it opens the door to an engaged Web search and discussion about cerebral palsy.

Next, to further help students connect with Shawn, that night's homework is for them to sit alone and motionless (except for their eyes) in their room for 15 minutes. To make things even more challenging, I require that they not lie down or have any type of electronics on while doing this. As they sit in silence, I ask them to pay attention to what they see, hear, smell, and feel. After 15 minutes, students write down what they experienced and noticed during this process. They bring this to class the next day and discuss the results. And while this all sounds simple, you'll be amazed at how difficult it is for today's "instant gradification" teens (and adults) to effectively complete this assignment. Note: This assignment could also easily be completed in class.

Once we finish the novel, students engage in a debate about the two possibilities of the open ending. I divide the class in half and assign each side a position (Side one: Shawn lives. Side two: Shawn dies). Each team is then given five minutes to prepare its arguments, followed by three minutes to present its case. Because of the size of the debate, I ask each side to nominate one speaker to present the ideas. Once each side has stated its position, they are each given an additional two minutes of rebuttal time (led by another elected speaker). The value in doing something like this is that it gives students a sense of ownership in the novel, while at the same time, it sharpens their critical-thinking and communication skills. I tend to keep it short because things can get pretty heated, but if it remains somewhat civilized, I've been known to offer extra time. I would also recommend reminding students to stick with evidence from the text rather than injecting personal views (which can be challenging for teens).

American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang (Grades 7–10)

Jin Wang, a Chinese American student, starts off at his new school with one goal in mind—to become an all-American boy. He wants it so badly, in fact, that he is willing to do anything to make it happen. Danny, meanwhile, *is* the all-American boy, complete with blond hair and basketball skills. Things for him are great . . . until his painfully stereotypical Chinese cousin Chin-Kee shows up. And



not to be outdone, there is the Monkey King, anxious to join the immortal gods in heaven. Written as a graphic novel, *American Born Chinese* weaves these seemingly unrelated tales into one masterful story about identity, race, and accepting yourself for who you are.

When I give my initial overview of *American Born Chinese,* I show my class a few pages of the book to illustrate the concept of a graphic novel. Some students will be familiar with the genre, while for others, this will be their first experience with it. After looking at a few examples, I divide my class into small groups to discuss what they, as readers, believe are the benefits and drawbacks of the graphic novel. Generally you'll get a wide range of responses, but the idea that comes up most frequently centers on how, because the illustration is there, fewer words are needed to describe each scene—and if this doesn't come up, you need to work that teacher magic to make sure that it does.

Building on this, I show my class a series of pictures and ask them to describe each using "text language." To make it even more challenging, I limit them to using 140 characters for each picture (the amount allowed for a tweet). I generally pick out some famous pictures, such as Einstein with his

tongue out or Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington, but any picture works just as well as another. This assignment is beneficial to students in that it forces them to be selective in their word choice. Writing concisely is a difficult skill to learn, and this is a fun and effective way for students to experiment with it. And, yes, you will get some nontraditional words and spellings . . . but tnk how kwl u will look 2 evry 1!!!

As a closing activity, I hand out a sheet of paper divided into four columns (see fig. 3). In the first column, I ask the students to take a few minutes to write down 10–15 defining characteristics about themselves. I encourage them to include a variety of personal features, ranging from the recognizable (gender, hair color, height) to the unrecognizable (religion, family background, pets). Next, I ask them to list in the second column if they consider these traits to be positive or negative. Next, in the third column, students once again look at their list and consider if they have ever been judged by others based on each characteristic (supplying a yes/no to each). This often gets them fired up, and that's when I drop column four on them. For this one, I ask them to answer if they themselves have ever judged *anyone else* based on those factors (once again supplying a yes/no response).

This is usually when the room goes quiet.

And that's how I leave it, just sitting there like an 800-pound gorilla in the room.

FIGURE 3. You Be the Judge

PERSONAL TRAITS	+ OR –	OTHERS / YOU	YOU / OTHERS
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			

I don't ask the students to share what they learned or for us to all have a group hug. The goal of this assignment is not about admitting fault—it's about changing actions. And in this situation, the most powerful thing I can do is to remain silent and just let the reality sink in. I usually stay silent until it gets a little awkward—and then wait about another ten seconds before talking.

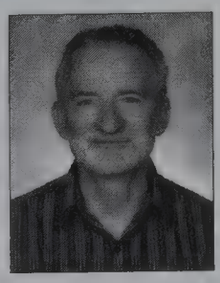
One last thing about *American Born Chinese*: students always ask about the picture on the last page. I don't know why it's there or what the connection is, but here's what it's referring to. And trust me, your students will want to see it (if they haven't already!): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1LZVmn3p3o.

Connecting Books with Contemporary Teens

When done correctly, novels about outcasts teach students more about themselves than they do the outcast. The assignments and activities discussed here will challenge teens to look at their thoughts and their actions in a way that is neither heavy-handed nor preachy, yet still gets the point across. And until that day comes when there are more Marsha Bradys than Jan Bradys in the world (which I don't see happening anytime soon), novels such as *Of Mice and Men, Stuck in Neutral,* and *American Born Chinese* deserve to be recognized as valuable teaching resources that help teens uncover who they are as individuals.

Mike Roberts teaches eighth-grade English at Rowland Hall Middle School in Salt Lake City, Utah. Beyond the classroom, he has spent the past several years presenting to teachers and librarians from across the country about the benefits of using young adult literature in the classroom. For more information about this column, its ideas, or future suggestions, please feel free to email him at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

Why I No Longer Teach Vocabulary



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> The second grade was as bad as the first, only worse—they still flashed cards at you and wouldn't let you read or write.
>
> —*Harper Lee,* To Kill a Mockingbird

One day last spring I was walking along the avenue that borders the north side of the University of California at Berkeley. My attention was drawn to a long, colorful splay of blue wisteria dangling from the upper floor of a two-story apartment building across the avenue. I thought to myself, *That's a beautiful patch of wisteria on that balustrade.*

That stopped me in my tracks. *Where did* that *word,* balustrade, *come from?* What a mystery that I should "speak" a word that I didn't consciously *know.*

I couldn't wait to get home to see if I'd used the word correctly. I was almost shocked to find that I had, indeed, used it correctly.

Since my first days as an English teacher I've been interested in how children learn words. Numerous authors have noted the extraordinary vocabulary growth of children. Frank Smith cites a 1978 study by Susan Carey showing that six-year-olds have mastered an average of 14,000 words "without much help from teachers" (*Essays* 290–91). How many did my students learn from me, how many from somewhere else?

Traditional Assumptions

It's one of those assumptions of the English teaching game that students must learn and store up vocabulary as a precondition of tackling literature or history or any of those fields that feature big words. How, some ask, could a child read a challenging passage if he or she didn't understand those key, usually multisyllabic, words often sprinkled throughout textbooks and literary works? Yet even in my first days of vocabulary instruction I developed troublesome doubts about my methods of teaching words. It seemed as if my students never "got it." Many could successfully memorize dictionary definitions by the dozens, but I never had the sense that these words actually became part of the students' lexicons. Every teacher I know has a store of misunderstandings and malapropisms that they've received on word tests and during class discussions. A colleague once had a student who—seeking a synonym for *deep*—offered, "I jumped into the profound pool."

Years ago I attended a teacher training session where a nice woman insisted that students could not understand a passage in a history textbook unless they already knew—in advance—90% of the words in the passage. On the overhead projector she displayed two or three paragraphs with numerous words blacked out. She asked us to guess the meaning of the passage. No one could. I quietly seethed.

What the trainer had done was to strip the reading process of every contextual clue that a normal reader would have at his or her disposal. A history student encountering the instructor's passage would have pictures, headings, and fonts, not to mention the teacher's words and gestures. It was

hard to escape the idea that this lesson was intended to supply a justification for the drill-and-test methods used by English teachers since the horse-and-buggy days. My doubts about what I'd been taught to do increased.

Over my first few years I struggled to contrive strategies that would lead to *real* comprehension. I insisted that students use each word in a sentence. I made sure that they had at least one experience of seeing the word in context. I tried, whenever possible, to make sure the words I taught would prove useful in upcoming readings. But nothing seemed to work. Words "learned" in September would be forgotten by December. Writing assignments were often filled with misused words. Seldom did I see a student who seemed to be expanding his or her vocabulary because of my efforts.

I consulted an assortment of books on reading, trying to understand the process of word acquisition. Smith said that if you want a child to learn words, have him or her read. I increased the amount of reading in my typical class period. But this still left me with lingering doubts about my responsibilities. And students began to complain. "You want us to read too much!" said one student. "We read too much that it takes up most of the day's time. We need to read less," said another. "I think you should have . . . actual English lessons; grammar, vocab," said one college-bound girl.

Then one day in the library I chanced on a research article from 1985 that got me so excited I wanted to go outside and tell everyone who walked past that I'd finally found the answer to years of questions about vocabulary development.

A New Direction

"Learning Words from Context" (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson) offered a plausible explanation of my own—and my students'—vocabulary growth and, more importantly, supported my decision to abandon direct instruction of vocabulary in my English classes. A group of University of Illinois researchers, led by William E. Nagy, designed an elegant experiment that measured the vocabulary growth of a group of fifth graders. To gauge student word growth they didn't rely on multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank tests; they interviewed each student.

When they finished they concluded the following:

1. "[C]omplete learning of a word's meaning is a gradual process" (236)
2. "[C]hildren's vocabularies contain large numbers of partially-known words" (251)
3. "[T]he impression that direct vocabulary instruction is more efficient than learning from context is an illusion" (251)

The researchers were even able to quantify the difference between direct and incidental vocabulary growth: "If one divides the increase in number of words known by the total instruction time," they wrote, "an average of .02 words are learned per minute of [direct] instruction. In contrast . . . about .25 words were learned [simply by reading] per minute" (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson 251). Readers learn words at *more than twelve times* the rate of those relying on direct instruction!

I could see my reading experience in the children studied by Nagy and his colleagues. I could see how I—and my students—gradually figured out the meanings of words as we repeatedly came across them in our everyday reading. I now had a logical explanation for what I had observed in my classroom.

I recalled my Navy days when I learned to navigate the coastal waters of Florida at night. We'd take a sighting to the northwest (a two-second green flashing light), then to the west (a white, constant light), then to the southwest (a flashing red light), then chart the readings on our map. Only after repeating this process a few times could I confidently use my plot to guide our ship through the waters. My students were learning vocabulary the same way with the same uncertainties the first times through.

The Power of Reading

I still had one problem. Teachers understandably believe they hold the keys to the kingdom—the words one needs to woo a lover or garner that lucrative job or write the great American novel (or read the next page of the social studies textbook). Could I argue that all this dictionary work was wrong-headed?

I got a clue to this answer when I came across a quote from the philosopher Karl Popper in another of Smith's books. "Precision can only be achieved," said Popper, "at the cost of clarity" (qtd. in Smith, *Understanding* 165). I began to see that my lessons were fooling students into believing that the dictionary was the end of their search for meaning instead of the beginning.

In all my teaching I try to get students to think. What takes more thinking than words? You look up a word in the dictionary, you think you have it mastered—only to find that the next time you see that word it doesn't look or seem the same. Smith points out that "the thieves decided to head for the bank" means one thing when you are in a car, another thing when you are in a river (*Understanding* 31). Teachers argue that they can prepare you for these confusions. And once in a while they can. But words are slippery, especially for inexperienced readers.

Sending students to the dictionary is generally a frustrating experience. They come back satisfied that they have learned a word, when I know they have only set themselves up for frustration because next time the word will not be so kind as to appear in exactly the same way with exactly the same purpose.

And so, when I'm feeling brave, I tell my colleagues that I no longer teach vocabulary. They laugh. They insist I must mean new and *better* teaching of vocabulary—teaching words in context, words of interest to young readers, words that might be on the SAT, words that appear in their class-assigned reading. And, truthfully, I can hardly bear the notion of depriving my colleagues of those quiet moments in the classroom when students are diligently copying down definitions or collecting synonyms or contriving sentences using all those new terms. So far I haven't had the nerve to clarify colleagues' misunderstanding of my point.

English Journal articles are generally focused on explaining how to teach. I'm not sure how to justify an article about how *not* to teach. What I've tried to do in my classes is to provide as much reading as possible. I was encouraged at last year's NCTE Annual Convention where I encountered several speakers advocating that English teachers allocate large chunks of time for quiet reading of articles of interest to the students—and chosen by the students whenever possible. Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* was a notable example of a teacher who pushed reading as the primary activity of the middle school classroom.

To turn this kind of reading into standards-based learning I have found my students need three things:

1. a genuine *need* to know, an interest in what they are reading;
2. contextual clues, e.g., pictures on the page, titles, the font and layout, the table of contents, and lots of other, subtle helpers; and
3. prior knowledge of the subject—which often means using film or the Internet or other ways to give students enough context to enjoy their reading.

To understand a word, it is necessary to see it in as many contexts as possible. To define a word in isolation generally means a futile trip down a blind alley. Examples, by repeated exposure, make for the best vocabulary lessons.

Reading is the key. And it is reading for enjoyment that is my way of teaching vocabulary.

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Jerry Heverly teaches English and basic computer skills at San Leandro High School in San Leandro, California.

2011 Norman Mailer High School and College Writing Awards for Creative Nonfiction

The Norman Mailer Writers Colony and the National Council of Teachers of English are pleased to invite submissions for the 2011 Norman Mailer High School and College Writing Awards.

Norman Mailer produced extraordinary works in many genres. Students may submit work in any of the many subgenres of creative nonfiction: memoir or autobiography, essay, literary journalism, profiles of people or places, and so on. Whatever its type, the best work will be true material presented with compelling literary merit. Entries will be accepted online **March 1–April 28, 2011.** See details at http://www.ncte.org/awards/student/nmwa. Email questions to nmw@ncte.org.

- The **High School Competition** is open to all high school students. The winner will receive a cash award of $5,000 and travel and lodging to attend the Colony's National Award Ceremony.
- The **Two-Year College Competition** is open to first-and second-year full-time students enrolled in community colleges, junior colleges, and technical colleges. There is a cash award of $5,000 plus travel and lodging to attend the Colony's National Award Ceremony.
- The **Four-Year College Competition** is open to current full-time undergraduate students. The winner will receive a cash award of $10,000 and a scholarship to the Norman Mailer Writers Colony during the summer of 2012.

Call for Nominations: James Moffett Award

NCTE's Conference on English Education offers this grant to support teacher projects inspired by the scholarship of James Moffett. Each proposed project must display an explicit connection to the work of James Moffett and should both enhance the applicant's teaching by serving as a source of professional development and be of interest and value to other educators. All K–12 classroom educators who teach at least three hours or three classes per day are eligible to apply for the grant. Proposals on which two or more K–12 classroom educators have collaborated are also welcome.

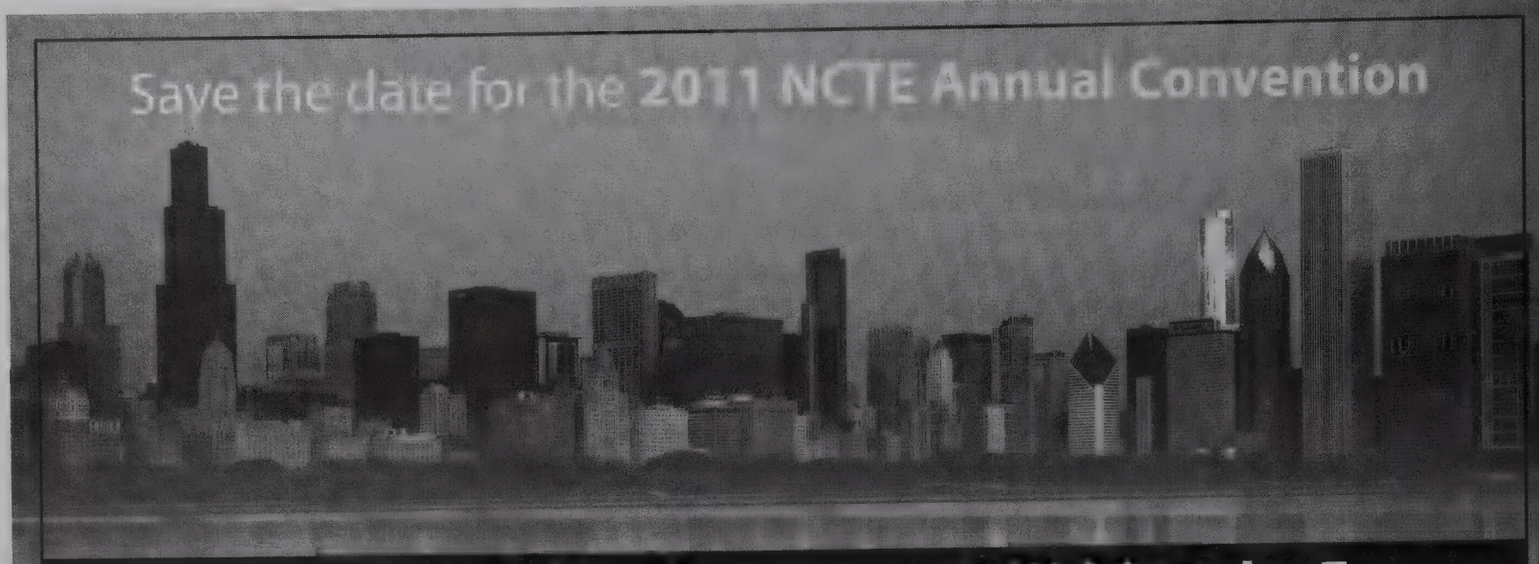
Moffett Award winners receive a certificate designating the individual as the 2011 recipient of the CEE Moffett Award and a monetary award (up to $1,000) to be used toward implementation of the proposed project. See http://www.ncte.org/cee/awards/moffett for complete information.

Submit proposals to CEE Moffett Award, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096 or cee@ncte.org, Attn: CEE Administrative Liaison. Proposals must be postmarked by **May 1, 2011.**

Search for a New Editor of *English Journal*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *English Journal.* In July 2013, the term of the present editor, Ken Lindblom, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for her or his first issue in September 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *English Journal* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.



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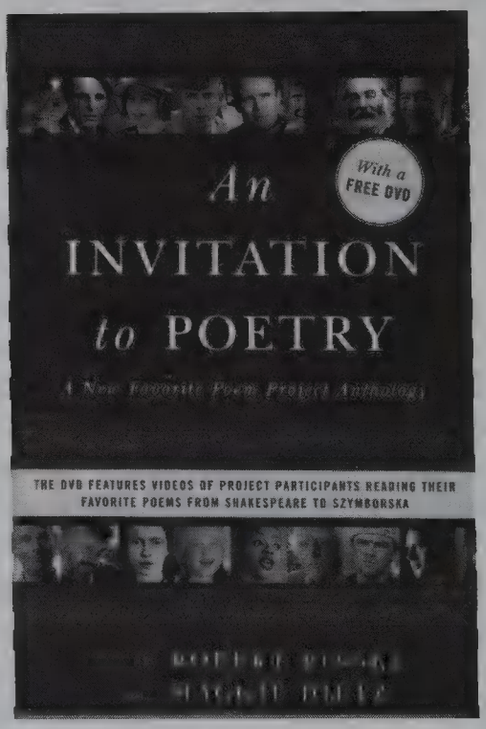

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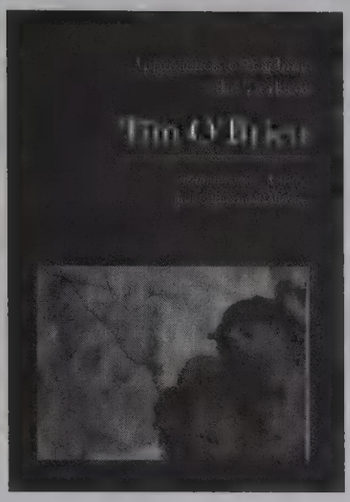

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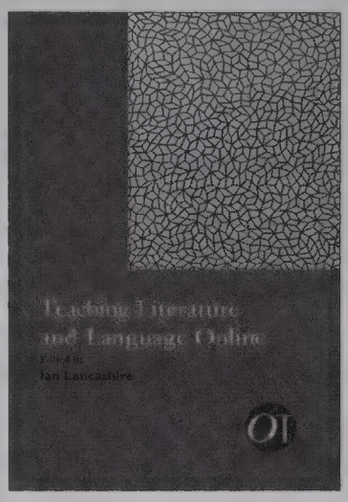

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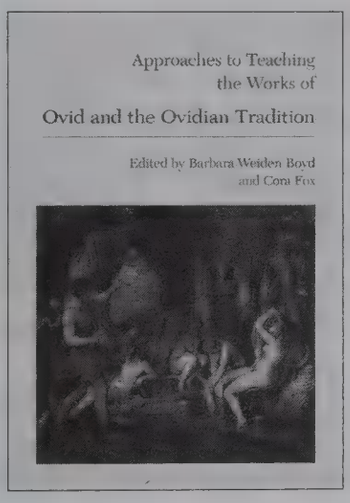

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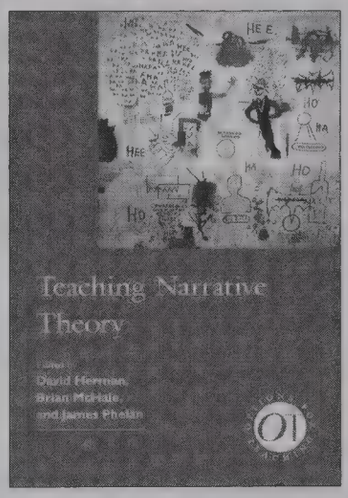

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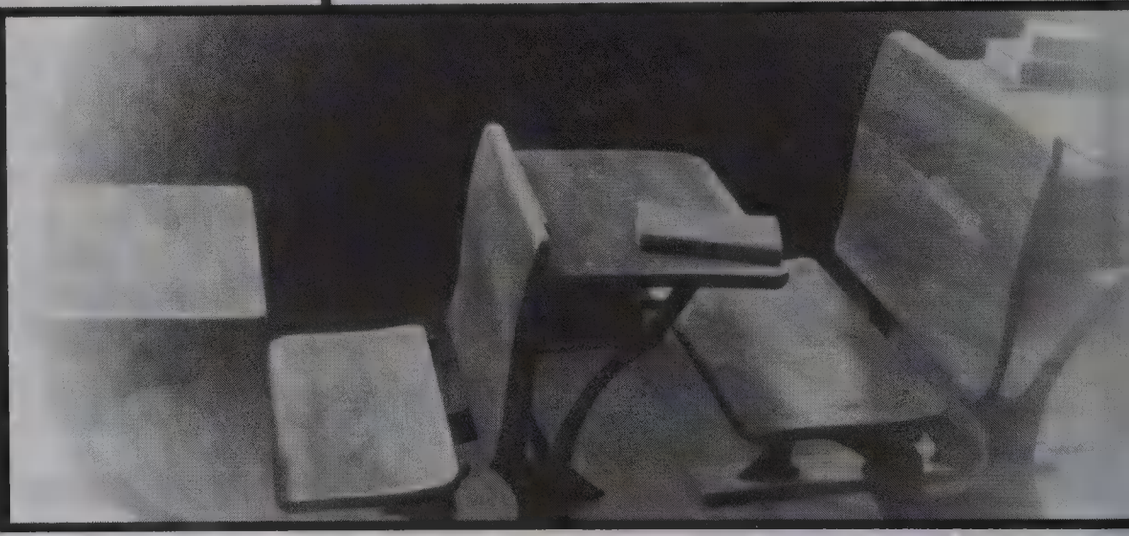

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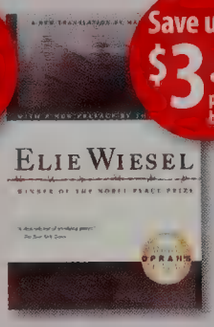

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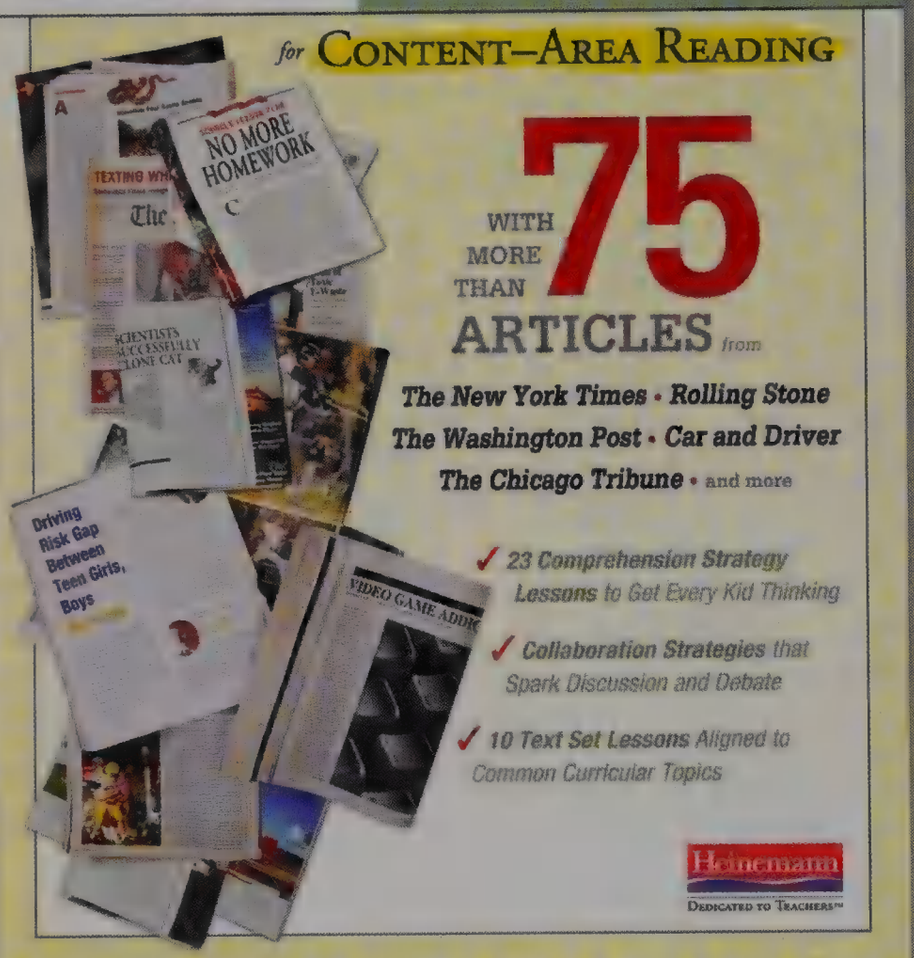

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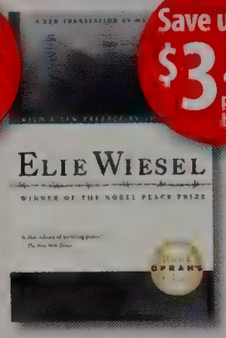

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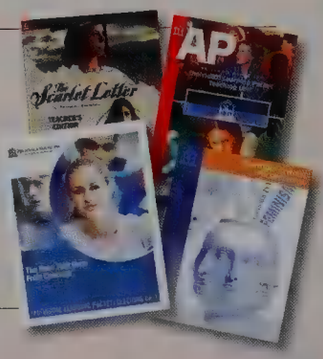

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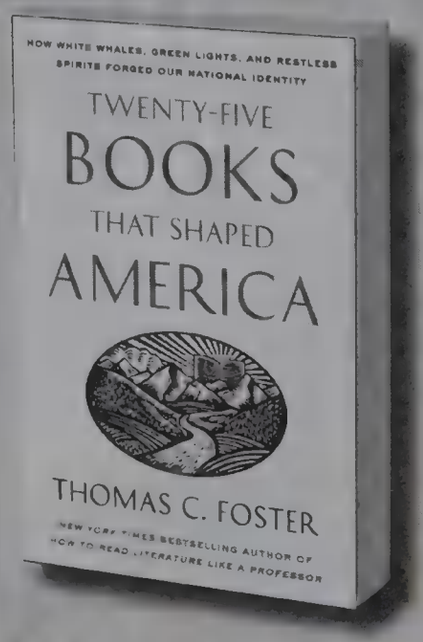

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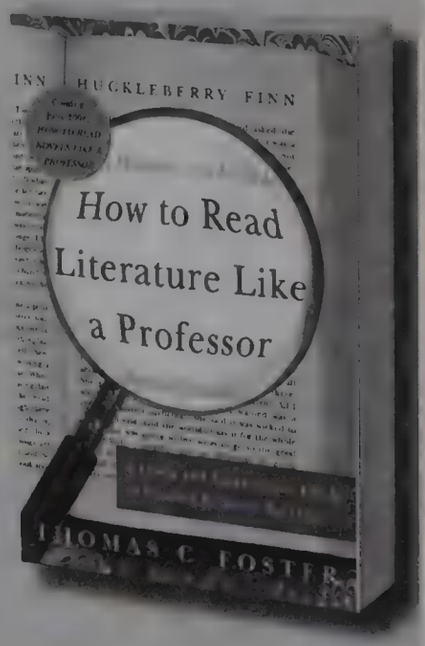

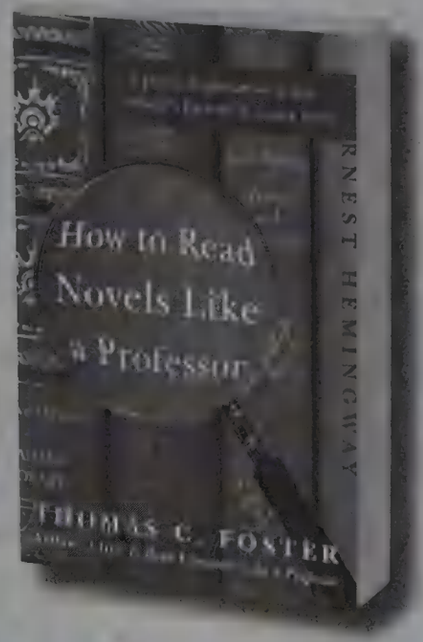

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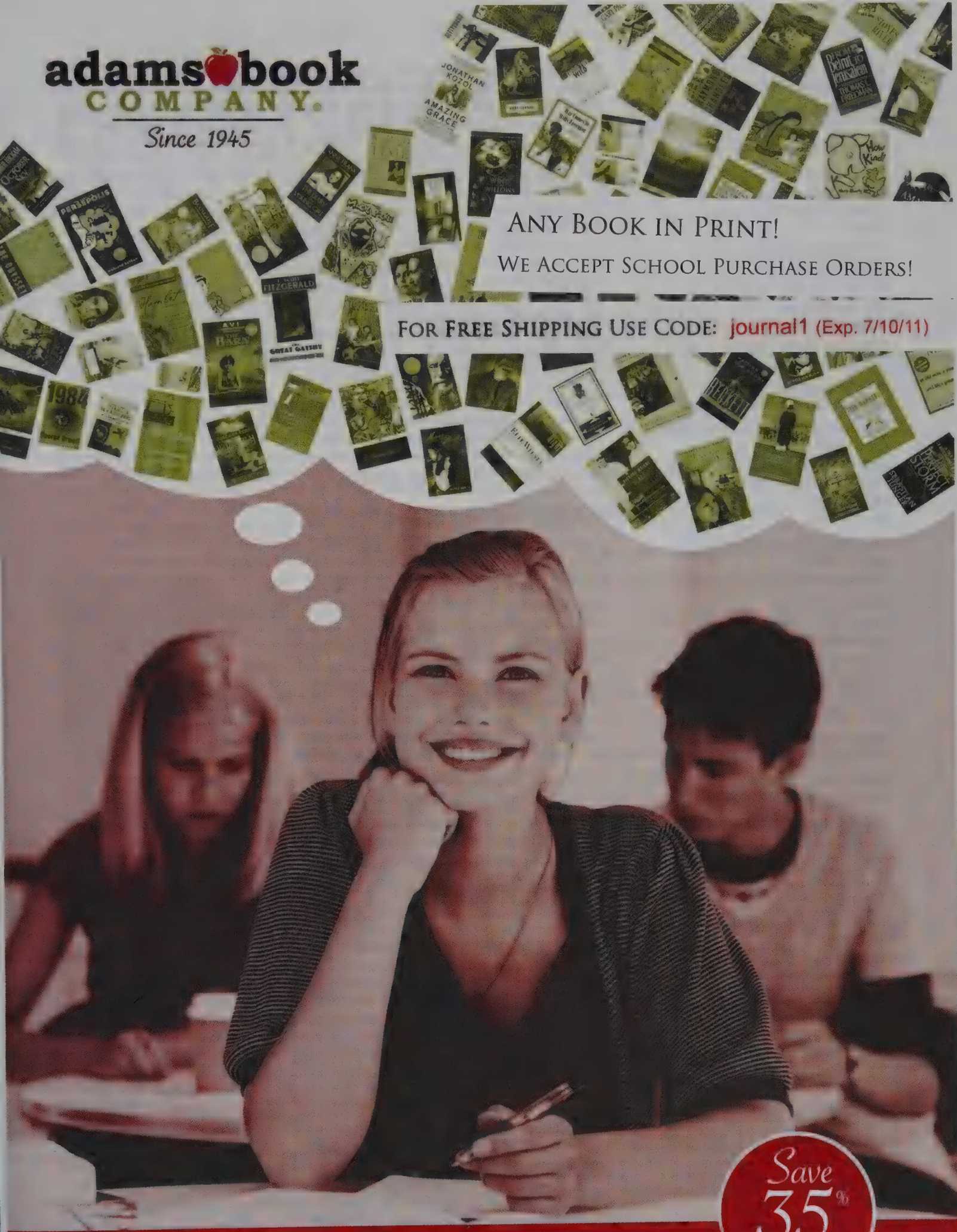

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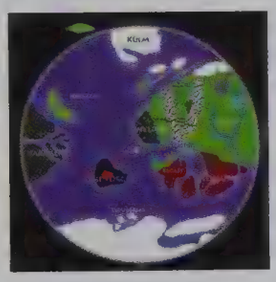

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Ken Lindblom, Editor
English Journal
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Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be sent by email as an attachment to English_Journal@notes.cc.sunysb.edu. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and works cited), with standard margins. Word 2000 or later is preferred. Authors using Macintosh software should save their work as Word for Windows. **Paper submissions should be sent only when email is impossible.** Please save copies of anything you send us. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- In general, manuscripts for articles should be no more than 10 to 15 double-spaced, typed pages in length (approximately 2,500 to 3,750 words).
- Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.
- Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the NCTE *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language.* (See address below.)
- Number all pages.
- Use in-text documentation, following the current edition of the *MLA Handbook.* Where applicable, a list of works cited and any other bibliographic information should also follow MLA style.
- List your name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and email address on the title page only, not on the manuscript. Receipt of manuscripts will be acknowledged by email, when possible, or by mail.

English Journal is refereed, and virtually all manuscripts are read by two or more outside reviewers. We will attempt to reach a decision on each article within five months. The decision on pieces submitted in response to a specific call for manuscripts will be made after the call deadline.

Prospective contributors should obtain a copy of the *Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language* from the NCTE website at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang.

Celebrating a Century of *English Journal*
Publication Date: January 2012

The first *English Journal* was published in January 1912. In the January 2012 issue, we'll offer critical perspectives on 100 years of English teaching theory and practice, retrospectives from former *EJ* editors, and more.

The Community in the Classroom
Deadline: July 15, 2011
Publication Date: March 2012

Classroom community is an essential ingredient in a healthy, productive English class. In a classroom with a strong sense of community, students will write with more energy; review the writing of their peers with more effort, honesty, and sensitivity; and spur each other on to better accomplishments and have more fun in the process. Students who feel a sense of duty to their classmates and feel respected by their peers and teachers will be more open about their thoughts and amenable to learning new ideas. In what innovative ways have you established and maintained classroom community? What works of literature or writing assignments have you used to help students better understand and engage in the class as members of a larger community?

The community outside the school is also an important part of an English class. The community raises the children we educate, pays for our schools, employs our graduates, and supports (or impedes) our teaching efforts. A positive connection between the English classroom and the outside community can greatly enhance students' (and teachers') experiences in many ways. And, instilling in students a sense of duty and service to the community can richly enhance those communities far into the future. How have you gotten local leaders and businesspeople involved in projects associated with your English class? How have you involved parents or other family members in helping students develop ELA skills and knowledge? In what ways have you encouraged students to engage in community service (local, national, global, in person or online) in ways that enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, or presenting skills?

For this issue of *English Journal,* we welcome articles that speak to the ways in which the concept of community can improve students' knowledge and abilities in English.

General Interest
May submit any time

We publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles foreground classroom practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

Ongoing Features

Speaking My Mind: We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear with your photo in a future issue of *English Journal.* We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects.

Student Voices: This is a forum for students to share their experiences and recommendations in short pieces of 300 words. Teachers are encouraged to submit the best responses from their classes, not whole class sets, please. Individual students are welcome to submit as well.

- What new information have you learned about your community or a person in your community as a result of an English class assignment? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)

Teacher to Teacher: This is a forum for teachers to share ideas, materials, and activities in short pieces of 300 words.

- How have you used an English assignment to get students more involved in the community or members of the community more involved in your classroom? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)

Original Photography

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be sent as 8″ × 10″ black-and-white glossies or as an electronic file in a standard image format

at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer's name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

Original Cartoons

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. Line drawings in black ink should be submitted on $8^1/_2$" × 11" unlined paper and be signed by the artist.

Columns and Column Editors

Challenging Texts
Editor: P. L. Thomas

Franz Kafka proclaimed that a "book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." The authors and texts we bring into our classrooms and the acts of literacy that students perform about and because of those texts are essential aspects of creating classrooms where students become critical readers and critical writers. This column will explore the authors and texts we choose that confront the world and the worldviews of students. We also explore various theoretical approaches to literature that challenge and energize students and teachers.

Contributors should explore and share their classroom practices that address questions such as, What authors and texts confront the world and students' assumptions? What texts expand students' perceptions of and assumptions about genre? What texts confront both big ideas and the art and craft of writing? How does critical pedagogy look in literature classrooms? What literary theories do you find most generative?

Submit an electronic Word file attached to your email to the column editor, P. L. Thomas, at paul.thomas@furman.edu. Contributors are encouraged to query the column editor and share drafts of column ideas as part of the submission process.

Mentoring Matters
Editor: Thomas M. McCann

Some critics use the disturbing phrase "eating their young" to refer to the way some school leaders and veteran teachers treat new teachers. The image refers to the regrettable practice of allowing the newcomer to endure the least desirable conditions in a school or department. In contrast, caring veteran teachers will be sensitive to the need to foster growth and to promote a sense of self-efficacy in new colleagues. The development of any teacher is not complete after departure from a teacher preparation program. Professional growth continues for years, and supportive colleagues can play a significant role in influencing the development, satisfaction, and retention of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This column invites contributors to offer practicing teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs their insights about how to mentor and support early-career English teachers, including reports from early-career teachers about their positive mentoring experiences. We especially encourage specific suggestions for practices that will help veteran teachers to support newer colleagues in developing positive relationships with students, contending with pressures to conform to test-driven curricula, handling an enormous workload, and forming collaborative relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and parents.

We invite column contributions of 500–1,500 words addressing themes about mentoring and supporting early-career teachers. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Thomas M. McCann at tmccann1@niu.edu.

Off the Shelves
Editor: Mark Letcher

We are living in a new golden age of young adult literature. Edgy and engaging titles by authors both emerging and established have been pushing the field of young adult literature (YAL) to places we've never seen before. Teen readers are seeing more innovative formats and genre-blending in their reading, are exposed to authors from around the world, and are blurring the lines between previously established "teen" and "adult" fiction.

There may be no better time to celebrate and promote the diversity, characters, issues, and pure literary craftsmanship that YAL offers its audience, and our hope is that you will help us contribute to the conversation.

This column will explore a wide range of topics related to literature written for and/or read by young adults, with a strong emphasis on recently published works. We particularly welcome the voices and experiences of secondary teachers, for whom YAL provides vital classroom reading, suggestions for eager and reluctant students, and engaging personal reading material.

Submissions of 500–1,500 words, inquiries, and suggestions for future column topics should be directed to Mark Letcher at mark.letcher@purduecal.edu.

Poetry
Editor: Anne McCrary Sullivan

In her poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," Naomi Shihab Nye reminds us that "poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes, / they are sleeping." Look inside your shoes, your desk drawers and kitchen cabinets, the hallways of your school, the grocery stores and garbage dumps of your community. "Find" some poems and send them to *EJ*. Choose those that seem a fit, either explicitly or implicitly, with announced themes of upcoming *EJ* issues. We are looking for well-crafted original poems in any style, serious or humorous, written by teachers, students, or those who love them. We do not consider previously published poems or simultaneous submissions.

Send by email attachment, for blind review, up to five poems with only phone number and initials on the page. In your email message, include brief biographical information. Poets whose work is published will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Send submissions to EJPoetry@nl.edu. Send correspondence to Anne McCrary Sullivan at ASullivan@nl.edu.

Professional Writing in the English Classroom
Editors: Jonathan Bush and Leah A. Zuidema

Professional writing in the English classroom is rich with possibilities. Students can learn to attend carefully to audience, purpose, and situation through all genres of writing, but these rhetorical concerns are especially relevant in professional writing contexts. This column focuses on the teaching of professional writing—writing that solves day-to-day problems, accomplishes work, and enables changes in organizations and communities. Professional writing instruction involves much more than teaching memos, proposals, or résumés; it can also be a way to teach for engaged, ethical citizenship. It encompasses ideas consistent with best practices in our discipline—

allowing students to think creatively and critically within complex rhetorical situations. It values multiple genres, textual conventions, and visual design. Through professional writing, students can address real issues (big or small) and work to effect change by writing to authentic audiences.

Professional writing can be combined with other, more traditional studies of writing, literature, and language. This column helps readers who seek to teach professional writing concepts and to expand their teaching to include new projects and genres. We welcome contributions from those who teach professional writing as well as those who see echoes of professional writing concepts in their other work with writing, literature, and language. Please send inquiries, submissions of 500–1,500 words, or suggestions for future column topics to Jonathan Bush at jbush@wmich.edu or Leah Zuidema at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom
Editor: Julie Gorlewski

Research provides a lens through which teachers can better understand our pedagogical successes and failures. Research illuminates the social and political contexts of education, enhancing our appreciation of students, their families, and the communities we serve. The principles of research offer a foundation for reflective practice.

Classrooms are laboratories for teaching and learning. In this era of accountability, it is important for teachers to apply research to practice. We must be collaborators in the process of deciding what works, not merely consumers of products deemed "research-based." In the spirit of a critical theoretical approach, this column will seek both to clarify and to problematize research-based practices.

Submissions for this column might include an informal mini-study or a story about an attempt—successful or not—to conduct classroom research. Contributors should focus on a classroom application of professional scholarship by considering these questions: What worked (and didn't work) in my classroom? Why? How do I know? Also welcome are short reviews of recently published books that contributors believe can enhance teachers' classroom research practices. Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words.

Authors, especially new contributors, are encouraged to submit ideas for columns. Send inquiries or submissions to gorlewsj@newpaltz.edu.

Success with ELLs
Editor: Margo DelliCarpini

English educators face increasing linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In fact, enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in the nation's public schools between the years 1990 and 2000 grew by 105%, compared to a 12% overall growth rate among the general school population. ELLs enter our classrooms with a variety of prior school experiences, cultural expectations, and literacy experiences. Making the English language arts curriculum accessible to ELLs can pose unique challenges. However, when teachers implement strategies that target the needs of ELLs, all students can benefit.

This column will be a place where classroom teachers can find helpful ideas for teaching ELLs. Please submit manuscripts regarding challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream English classes and how you have developed innovative strategies to address their needs while enhancing the learning environment for all learners. Please share materials and practices that you have found to be especially effective for your ELLs, reports of successful collaborative instruction, motivational strategies that you use, and ways you connect content to ELLs' lives. Secondary-level English teachers are especially encouraged to submit their ideas. New authors who have ideas for columns that need development are encouraged to contact the editor. Send ideas or complete submissions of 500–1,500 words to Margo DelliCarpini at margo.dellicarpini@lehman.cuny.edu.

Teaching Young Adult Literature
Editor: Mike Roberts

As English teachers, we are constantly faced with the challenge of teaching literature that is both thought-provoking *and* entertaining. With today's YA literature better than ever, now is the time to help students discover the joy—and sometimes the pain—that comes with reading a great book. YA literature can provide students with a chance to engage in reading that is meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable. Plus, YA literature can inspire energized discussions about topics students feel passionate about.

This column will explore *teaching ideas and strategies* for some of today's newest and most popular young adult literature. This is not a column that reviews literature; it describes effective ways of *teaching* young adult literature. We encourage submissions of 1,800–2,500 words that focus on effective ways of incorporating YA literature into the curriculum. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Mike Roberts at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

From the Editor

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Tips for Teachers to Publish in *English Journal*

The *English Journal* audience is my favorite group of colleagues. They are smart, professionally engaged, experienced, thoughtful, practical; they are also very, very busy. These features make the *EJ* audience a challenge and a pleasure to write for. There is no shortage of advice available for getting published in commercial forums or traditionally academic forums, but *EJ* is a unique journal, requiring academic background and a reader-friendly tone and format. Our manuscript reviewers are choosey and demanding—as they should be—but they are also generous with advice and have given wonderful suggestions for improving writers' chances for future success and improving the drafts that are accepted for publication.

Having edited *English Journal* for more than three years now, I have learned a lot from our reviewers about what makes a successful *EJ* article. I share here some of the most important information for authors who are interested in submitting their work for publication.

Start with a Big Idea, but Not Too Big

EJ readers are hungry for articles that refine their expertise and add creativity to their teaching. If you've created an assignment that uniquely engages students, or you've refined an assessment strategy, or you've completed a close examination of the results of a unit on students' learning, or you've assembled a collection of new texts that work well together, these may be good ideas for an article. If your idea is worth telling your colleague down the hall, it's worth considering for *English Journal.* We're all your colleagues down the hall; it's just a *really long* hall.

Most articles we accept are about 10–15 manuscript pages long and they focus on one idea. They don't tell every aspect of that idea or try to cover an entire course or unit. Rather, they focus on the most important aspect(s) of the idea and explain it in depth, with examples (often from student work) and with reference to other published articles that relate to the idea in some meaningful way. One mistake that some authors make is to try to write an article that does everything. Often, doing so requires a series of articles or a book. To write for *EJ,* start with just one article.

Get to the Point

EJ readers are busy and practical professionals. They are interested in thoughtful approaches to teaching and learning, but they want to know—quickly—what the value of the article will be for them and their students. Most readers will scan an article first, looking at the title, the brief abstract, the first few paragraphs, and the pull quotes to determine what the article is about. Successful authors ensure their readers will understand within the first few paragraphs what they will get from reading the full article. We receive many potentially excellent articles that suffer from one of two problems. I explain them here to encourage writers to avoid them:

The surprise ending: Some submissions explain details at the beginning but don't say what the larger purpose for those details is until the end. If

the purpose of the assignment is to help students write better and develop skills to enhance community activism, say so and say it soon. If the purpose of your unit is to help teachers incorporate creativity into their assessments, make that clear in the beginning. If your assignment was so effective that it surprised you, don't make the audience wait for that information: tell them immediately, and fill in the details along the way. If your essay doesn't make clear exactly what its value is for English teachers until the end, flip it and start your next draft with the last few paragraphs.

The story of the idea: Many authors recount for us how they came up with an idea for teaching, what they did to prepare for the assignment, what their original goals were, and then they get to the specific idea. This rarely works for our reviewers. Instead, write what happened that made the idea a success and then help other *EJ* readers replicate or adapt the idea for their own teaching. Authors may find writing a narrative of their experience helps them to later write an article draft, but this narrative is not itself a draft of an *EJ* article.

Refer to Published Work

English Journal captures national conversation on topics of interest to ELA teachers. To be most effective, an *EJ* article should make some references to other academic articles, especially other *EJ* articles. There are several reasons for making references:

Enhancing your professional ethos: Demonstrating you have read the important work related to your idea gives your approach credibility.

Adding evidence and depth to your idea: You can use other authors' works to lend proof for the value of your idea or to expand the information readers can get from your work. If you know of an article or book that offers more about some aspect of the idea you are discussing, point your readers to that source. They'll appreciate your help.

Contextualizing your approach: If you can identify works that are similar in some way to yours, you can refer to them to help readers understand the context and value of your article. Likewise, if your article is suggesting a different approach from some well-known writers, then referring to them can also help readers quickly understand where you stand.

Give Examples *from* the Classroom and *for* the Classroom

Our readers appreciate student work that clarifies or demonstrates the value of the assignment or approach described in the article. Including relevant examples of authentic student writing, photos of students presenting, or references to a website where student videos or podcasts may be found are always a big plus. Keep in mind that to publish student writing or creative products, NCTE requires written consent from students (and a parent or guardian, if the student is under 18), even if pseudonyms are used; consent forms may be found at our website (http://www. ncte. org/journals/ej).

Also, authors who include handouts, rubrics, or other classroom material are far more likely to be published and are more likely to be read and appreciated by the *EJ* audience. *EJ* readers are hungry for new, classroom-ready ideas, and our reviewers look for them.

Become a Reviewer

Many *EJ* reviewers are already published authors, but because we want our journal to speak to all English teachers, we also solicit reviewers who have never published. Many reviewers tell us that reviewing articles for us helps them better understand what we look for in articles and helps them revise their own submissions more effectively. If you're interested in reviewing articles for us (generally, we ask reviewers to review 2–3 articles per year), please see "Become a Reviewer" on the *EJ* website (http://www. ncte. org/journals/ej).

Read the Journal like a Writer

One of the most important things an aspiring *EJ* author can do is read the journal carefully as a writer. Reading as a writer means noticing the larger structure of articles and how they appeal to their audience; seeing how authors use subheadings and paragraph breaks to guide readers; and understanding the ways in which authors make references, explain examples, use allusions to the classroom, offer advice and caveats, and otherwise make their work appropriate for *EJ*. Reading articles can also help aspiring authors to understand

the informal yet informed tone that makes *EJ* so readable and can help authors understand how to use professional terminology without making their writing overly technical. If you take a few hours to read articles specifically to understand how they are composed and what they accomplish for readers, you will be in a much better position to write and revise your own work in a way that makes it well suited for *English Journal.*

Why Write for Publication?

Most peer-reviewed forums have low acceptance rates, and *English Journal* is among them. Why try if the chances of publication are quite slim?

You can significantly improve your chances of publication by following advice from sources such as this editorial. Also, if you know others who have published in *EJ,* ask them to respond to a draft—or talk with you about the idea before you even write a draft. If you've been the student of a local professor or you've been a cooperating teacher for a local college, you could ask a member of that faculty to meet with you about an idea for publication. Teaming up with an interested colleague or two can add a social dimension to your professional writing and give you a group to motivate and support your efforts.

Even with the low success rate, writing for publication pays dividends. When you write for publication, you widen your professional community: you become one of tens of thousands of English professionals participating in the national conversation. You may receive reviewer reports on your submission, which can greatly enhance your ability to write successful articles in the future. And you'll refine your approaches in your classroom as you think about them more fully and articulate them clearly in your article drafts.

Most importantly, if you write for publication—in any forum, not just *EJ*—I believe you will be a better writing teacher. You'll develop much more personal, real-world experience as a writer, and you'll bring that authentic experience to your students. You'll be able to teach them much more about writing for the world outside the classroom, and your students will respect you for it.

Unfortunately, few English teachers are expected to or given the time to write for publication, even though they are expected to be expert writing teachers. I wish that would change, but nothing in the news makes me hopeful that it will happen soon. Still, if you ask any teacher who's also an author if he or she finds the time put into publishing worthwhile, you're sure to get a rich and positive response. EJ

Ken Lindblom has taught English and writing at Columbia High School (East Greenbush, New York), Syracuse University, and Illinois State University, and he is now associate professor of English and director of English teacher education at Stony Brook University (SUNY). He has been editor of *English Journal* since 2008.

Using the "Smallest Parts" to Build a National Community of Professionals

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"The world, even the smallest parts of it, is filled with things you don't know" (97). Thus speaks Gordy, Junior's friend at Reardon High School in Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian.* Gordy's words are prophetic not only for Junior's conception of his world but also for teachers in terms of the importance of looking around themselves to push the boundaries of their understanding of education and classroom practice. It seems as if, in eerily parallel fashion, the push for educational reform that brought about the formation of NCTE in Chicago in 1911 has come full circle 100 years later. What we do as teachers has come under the microscopic scrutiny of the entire nation. Now, as in 1911, one of the most powerful tools we have is the ability to come together as a profession to share with each other what we do and what we've learned as educators. Together, we can bring about the positive changes needed in our nation's schools.

Playing an active role in our professional organization allows us to coax the powers that be in education to listen and learn from those who have spent a career learning the craft of teaching. The opportunities available through NCTE for professional development, community building, and networking are endless, and I know that my development as a teacher blossomed as a result of becoming involved in NCTE. But I must implore all of us to not only look to the national organization for professional growth and development but to also look within our state affiliates and down the hall from our own classrooms, whether they be English classrooms, social studies classrooms, or math classrooms, to find "the smallest parts . . . filled with things you don't know."

Looking into the classrooms of those within our own schools can be an enriching part of professional development and an opportunity to find the "things we don't know" and to create community at the grassroots level of education. Taking the time to observe, talk, and share lesson ideas and strategies is the first step in reflecting on our own teaching as we give and get knowledge from a variety of sources. Building classroom knowledge at this level and becoming confident in what we do within our schools can only increase our presence as the professionals-with-the-know-how when confronted by administrators or state boards of education demanding justification for what we do and how we do it. While engaging in community building at this level, we must all recognize the power this can have for the teachers entering our building as first-year teachers. They need to be swept up and embraced by this community to ensure their success in the classroom, as well as planting the seed for them to continue as a voice within state and national organizations.

The Power of NCTE Affiliates

Building a community of educators at a district level can and should enhance state affiliates. But teachers must push administrators to see the significance of involvement in this next level of professional community building, and there are several ways to do this. In my state affiliate, the Illinois Association of Teachers of English (IATE), we have several schools from around the state that year after year send a contingent of teachers to our conference. These teachers bring back knowledge gained and

share it not only with other teachers but also with school administrators. The 2010 IATE conference included a panel discussion made up of administrators at the state conference. The conference organizers invited administrators to attend the conference, with incentives if they brought teachers from the English department, to see what it is we do as a professional community and to be included in the conversations regarding standards and testing. When we can make apparent what we know, what we have learned, and, most importantly, how we can use this information to enhance our classroom practice and help our students enter the 21st century, then our profession can become more actively involved outside schools to effect change on a much larger scale. And again, bringing into the state affiliate first-year teachers provides yet another level of support as they will need to become advocates of education in the future.

If we work tirelessly to find and use the knowledge available at the local and state levels, and we can demonstrate the good work that comes out of our involvement to those with decision-making power, then our ability to bring this knowledge to the national level will be regarded as a necessity rather than a luxury. NCTE will be blessed with members who have taken the time to find the knowledge in the smallest places to filter that knowledge to the place in which our professional community gains access to national figures in education. Truly, none of these communities can thrive without the others. It seems Vygotskian, doesn't it, using zones of proximal development (Vygotsky 86) of knowledge and expertise to push a profession into a realm of endless possibility?

I urge all of you to peek into the room down the hall, to start a conversation with the math teacher, to bring a new teacher into your community, to show administrators what we do, to attend your state conference, and to become active participants in NCTE. What all of these have in common is the reliance on people, which is what education is all about: the collaboration among people. Our profession needs this now more than ever. After all, "if you let people into your life a little bit, they can be pretty damn amazing" (Alexie 129).

Works Cited

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian.* New York: Little, Brown, 2007. Print.

Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Ed. Michael Cole et al. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980. Print.

Amy Magnafichi Lucas is currently a graduate teaching assistant and a PhD candidate in English Studies at Illinois State University. Prior to this, she taught secondary English for ten years in rural Illinois and Wisconsin.

Search for New Editor of *Research in the Teaching of English*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Research in the Teaching of English.* In May 2013, the term of the present editors, Mark Dressman, Sarah McCarthey, and Paul Prior, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received no later than **August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in August 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *Research in the Teaching of English* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

William J. Broz

Not Reading: The 800-Pound Mockingbird in the Classroom

More students than we want to admit do not complete assigned reading, choosing instead to employ what Broz calls the strategy of* not reading. *He offers several dos and don'ts for encouraging students to accept teachers' invitations to read.

Not reading, even for many good students, has become a mode of operation with respect to book-length texts assigned in school. Many students enter our secondary and postsecondary literature classes *intending* to *not read* the books we assign. If you think that most of your secondary literature students are reading the canonical texts you assign, you might have to think again. I say this because my undergraduate students in general education literature courses and English education courses (at three different universities) have been telling me this and demonstrating it to me for twelve years. Many students have admitted to me and to their classmates that in high school they did not read any of the assigned books.

Again this semester, I will assign *To Kill a Mockingbird* (*TKM*) to the college seniors (mostly English majors) in my secondary literature methods course. I will do this because *TKM* is one of the most frequently assigned books in high school English classrooms and, thus, one of the most often *not read.* These points will be verified when I ask the class how many students were assigned to read that book in high school. The hands of most students in the room will go up. And when I then ask, "Truthfully, how many of you who were assigned to read *TKM* actually read it cover to cover?" nearly all of those hands will stay on the desks. Even though I already know some of the answers, I will say dramatically, "You are English majors who intend to become secondary English teachers! How could it be that you did not read the books assigned in English classes in high school?" The main answer will be, "You didn't have to. You could still get good grades." Then I will assert to them what I am asserting to *EJ* readers now: *If students do not read the assigned texts, nothing important is happening in your literature classroom*—nothing very important to develop your students' reading and interpretive abilities is happening, no matter how many lectures you deliver, vocabulary words students "learn," elements of fiction students define, quizzes students take, essay test answers students write, or films you show. Nothing important is happening because student development of reading and interpretive abilities requires engaged reading. Overcoming the phenomenon of *not reading* then becomes a primary focus of my methods course for the rest of the semester.

Yet, despite this stated course focus, 20% of the students in the methods class will still attempt another *not reading* of *To Kill a Mockingbird. Not reading* is such a strong mode of operation that at least two students will attempt to write reading response journals, student-generated discussion items, and short literary essays based on reading SparkNotes and other Internet chapter summaries they find among the 2.5 million Google hits on *To Kill a Mockingbird,* with such site titles as "Grade Saver: *To Kill a Mockingbird*"; "The *To Kill a Mockingbird* Student Survival Guide"; and "*To Kill a Mockingbird* Summary, Study Guide With Notes, Essays, Quotes, and Pictures." Sadly, every semester, one or two students are dismissed from the class for plagiarism. Another two or three students will

not believe me when I say that *not reading* will lead to failure in the course. Instead of reading they will wait for me to give them a way to avoid reading until it is too late and they have no journals, discussion items, or essays to turn in.

These experiences are the basis for my belief that my primary teaching goal in literature classes, whether secondary or postsecondary, is to convince students to accept the invitation to read the books. *Not reading* the books is the 800-pound mockingbird in any discussion of literature pedagogy.

In thinking about this teaching problem for the last few years, I planned to urge teachers to avoid assigning canonical texts such as *To Kill a Mockingbird,* for which the volume of Internet source material aimed at supporting student *not reading* is enough to choke the interpretive voice out of any reader. *The Great Gatsby* yields 2.5 million Google hits; *The Scarlet Letter,* more than 1.2 million; *The Old Man and the Sea,* a puny 589,000 hits. But not assigning these books is a copout because it is what *we* do as classroom teachers as we set up the invitation to read that suggests to students and later confirms for them that *not reading* will be a successful strategy. If we use study guides, comprehension quizzes, pseudo whole-class "discussions" that serve mainly to summarize and interpret the reading, and similar enabling strategies, we send the message to students that no engaged reading or individual interpretation of the text is necessary and that *not reading* the text is just fine.

My primary teaching goal in literature classes, whether secondary or postsecondary, is to convince students to accept the invitation to read the books.

In his foundational article about engaged learning, "The Liminal Servant and the Ritual Roots of Critical Pedagogy," written before such terms as *engaged* and *authentic* were part of our professional discussion of language arts pedagogy, Peter L. McLaren reveals a common circumstance in many smoothly operating classrooms: *teachers pretending to teach and students pretending to learn.* In such classrooms everyone agrees to go through the motions while little learning is taking place. I assert that engaged reading and the social discourse that arises from sharing one's reading with others represent a transformative ritual of the kind McLaren urges teachers to sponsor in classrooms.

To avoid creating pretend classrooms in which students do not read, we may use teaching and learning strategies that make reading necessary and then reward those students who have engaged in the authentic ritual of reading with the opportunity for social construction of knowledge based on those readings. That social construction of knowledge will occur during peer-to-peer book discussions and peer-to-peer sharing of textual interpretations through informal and formal writing and other performances. Simultaneously, we must have the integrity to admit that some small number of students who can read will not read, no matter what we do. If we plan our courses appropriately, *not reading* should mean that those students fail the course because they have no assignments to turn in. Students who can read and do not, have done nothing important enough to deserve passing grades in our classes, even if they have been present for every class period. When those few students fail, counselors or school psychologists can figure out why. We need to expect that our students will read the books we assign, and we need to teach and grade in ways that promote reading.

A List of Dos for Discouraging *Not Reading*

Recognize that knowing what happens in any particular book, even canonical books such as To Kill a Mockingbird, *is of little importance compared to developing students' abilities to read and make meaning from text.* It is the transformative ritual of actually reading *TKM* that makes the book important, not knowing who killed Bob Ewell. *TKM* still engages me, enlightens me, instructs me, and transforms me during every subsequent reading, though I have known what happens in the book for four decades. As with our writing pedagogy that focuses on teaching composing processes, in teaching literature we are teaching reading and interpretive processes, not right answers about a particular book.

Some students actually say to me, "I did read several books in high school, but I am already a senior in college and no professor in college has asked me about those books. What was the point of reading them?" Teachers who try to sell books with the line "You have to know this stuff for college" are part of the problem. Secondary students who will

be most successful in college literature courses are those who know how to read and interpret literature and have read a lot, thereby developing and maintaining strong *reading and interpretive abilities,* not students who remember the name of Jem's and Scout's snooty aunt.

Ask students to capture their reader responses to texts in journals or other informal writing that you review and grade and that students use to develop and refine their interpretations (Broz, "Reasons" 94; Youngblood). If you sponsor and value these kinds of reading and interpretive activities, students will also come to value their own readings. This student valuing will occur for several reasons. First, I give credit for informal journal writing and discussions that grow out of it. Second, small-group discussions based on student-generated reading responses and interpretations immediately demonstrate to student participants that what they and their classmates think about the book is interesting and important. Also, instructor and peer response to the drafts of short interpretive literary essays students write based on their own readings and interpretations will validate the whole process. Finally, most students will quickly realize that the easiest way to produce these written performances is in accompaniment to reading the book. Reading response journals will clearly tell you which students have read the book and how engaged their readings have been. Reading response journals and items for discussion (see explanation below) are not only strategies for student engagement and assessment tools. They also provide opportunities for teaching and learning, allowing teachers to nudge individual students into higher levels of reasoning and deeper interpretations. As assessments of reading engagement, journals and discussion items are of much higher quality and more accurate than quizzes and tests that can be copied, guessed at, or passed based on *not reading* strategies.

I require that reading response journals and discussion items include frequent page-numbered references covering the whole book. Journal entries made up of general comments, or retelling the story, that do not contain questions, quotes, and comments accompanied by page-numbered passage references and which do not cover the whole book, do not meet the assignment guidelines and are assumed to have been created based on *not reading* strategies.[1]

Invite students to read books that they can read *and that they might* want to read. Common readings should be accessible to all students. But common readings should make up only some of the reading invitations. Along with common readings, students should be invited to choose titles from units comprised of multiple copies of multiple titles organized by author, genre, or theme allowing all students to find their interest and reading ability while developing their reading and interpretive processes. Even in the ninth and tenth grades, thematic units can be anchored by a young adult title accessible to most students. The rest of the books in a thematic unit can include titles representing a range of reading abilities, most of which fall within the high school range, but some of which are accessible to struggling and advanced readers. Teaching strategies such as pairing the reading of a classic text with a young adult text as promoted by Joan F. Kaywell and others also insert accessible books into the curriculum that may help break the *not reading* cycle. Bonnie Ericson suggests using Mildred Taylor's *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* and other titles to support student reading and interpretation of *TKM.* I am not saying don't teach canonical texts. I am saying that when you invite students to read canonical texts, make sure you have positioned those students to accept the invitation to read.

Support students in developing their reading and interpretive abilities by inviting them to read any *high-quality text, including popular texts, young adult texts, regional and culturally relevant texts, and texts in non-traditional formats such as graphic novels.* Including some of these kinds of text can help break the cycle of *not reading.* Units containing multiple copies of multiple titles around a theme or author can contain some titles from all these categories, including canonical titles. Most importantly, offering accessible titles such as YA titles or popular titles as the first books you assign in a semester invites back into the game students who formerly enjoyed reading but who have stopped.

Young adult and popular titles are often devoid of easily accessible materials that support *not reading.* Beginning the semester with a common reading of a culturally relevant book by a local author catches students off-guard, makes them consider giving up the strategy of *not reading,* and may be an irresistible invitation to read. By beginning

the semester with successful reading and interpretive experiences, supported by good grades (I grade easier at the beginning while I am teaching students the class processes), I can make students believers in the proposition that I do value their interpretive responses. Beginning the semester with lively small-group discussion in which they have taken authoritative stances, students are usually motivated to be prepared for the next peer discussion. Being left out is no fun.

Some teachers use strategies that support *not reading* because they feel the need to compensate for the low reading abilities of some students. But even for poor readers, *not reading* is a useless and counterproductive strategy. Listening to the teacher summarize the story will not help struggling readers develop; only reading will. Differentiating texts and assignments is a better way of addressing differences in students' abilities.

Imagine an eleventh-grade American Literature class in which students were invited to read and respond to three stories by the same author in a particular week. The best readers would be expected to read and respond in reading journals to all of the stories. Grades of A required that. But a reading response journal that demonstrated engaged reading and developing interpretations of one story could earn a C. A selection of Steinbeck novels would work especially well. Struggling readers could read, respond to, and discuss one or two of the shorter novels, while the best readers could challenge themselves with *East of Eden.* In this context—where number of books and number of pages counted less than the dictate that every student read and compose journals for the whole time—many good readers would rise to the level of *East of Eden.* When the time for reading ended, every student could use his or her reading response journal to find a topic and formulate a thesis about something of interest in Steinbeck and of interest to them. Ideally students would experience engaged reading and have significant opportunity to develop their interpretive abilities. Struggling readers would also have these opportunities, but they would read fewer, more accessible, or shorter texts. Accommodating struggling readers would not mean advanced readers went unchallenged. This course was how I taught my own eleventh-grade English class, and I can attest that the students' engagement with the text far outstripped what I witnessed when I used more traditional approaches that inadvertently fostered *not reading.*

Encourage student reading by facilitating small-group book discussions and other student-centered activities that support reading. Sponsor these activities *during* the reading of the books instead of after the books are supposed to have been read. The activities should be based on student readings and interpretations. In these efforts, avoid right-answer activities such as quizzes and study guides.

Though much has been written about Reading Circles (Daniels) and other similar book-group strategies, I use a simple approach to managing peer-to-peer book-group discussions using student-generated discussion items. Discussion Items, or "DIs," as I call them, help students begin to refine their interpretations as well as prepare for small-group discussion.[2]

First, students produce reading response journals while reading any book-length text. Periodically, sometimes daily, while reading is in progress, students are invited to "mine" their journals for DIs (i.e., questions, comments, or quotes) they want to discuss in small groups. As artifacts of student reading and interpretation, the DIs, which I "check" but do not grade before small-group discussion, show me that students have read the text and that they are prepared for discussion. Students with no DIs are obviously not prepared and need more reading time. Students with no DIs are not granted entrée to a book group. They read while the prepared students discuss. *Not reading* is no longer an option. During these discussions students take turns round-robin fashion, bringing up each of their three to five DIs. After a point is adequately discussed, the student records a summary of the responses he or she received to the discussion item right on the DI sheet. Grading the DIs later, I can easily encourage deeper interpretations of the text. The response summaries also tell me something about each student's engagement in small-group discussion and allow me to value, with credit, these social construction of knowledge activities.

Invite students to participate in a robust interpretive process that involves choosing their own points of interpretation, refining the articulation of those interpretations, and presenting those interpretations to the community of readers that is the class through short literary essays and

other performances such as graphic response to literature (Broz, "The Green Knight"). Generally, we should be asking students to do what good adult readers do—read books they like, often for the social purpose of sharing their readings and interpretations with family members, reading partners, or book groups—all audiences of their peers who really want to know what each individual reader thought about the book. It is true that good adult readers do not write essays about the books they read outside of the school setting; however, they could. And coming to a book club meeting prepared to discuss themes, characters, passages, and other personal and cultural interpretations is similar to having drafted a short literary essay.

A Few Don'ts for Discouraging *Not Reading*

Don't spend class time recapping or summarizing assigned reading chapters to compensate for students' not reading. This summarizing often comes in the guise of large-group class "discussions." In *The Language of Interpretation: Patterns of Discourse in Discussions of Literature,* James D. Marshall, Peter Smagorinsky, and Michael W. Smith found a consistent pattern that shows these interactions to be little more than oral "fill-in-the-blank" exercises. While the teachers in this study envisioned student-centered discussions, the reality was that teachers controlled the talk in which only a few students participated while the rest passively withdrew. The teachers' turns at speaking were two to five times longer than students' turns, and questions posed in the discussions were nearly always the teachers'. Teachers' turns generally followed a pattern of "inform/question/respond," informing students about the text, questioning students about the text, then responding to students' brief answers by repeating or elaborating on them and using the students' answers as transitions in weaving a discourse that the teacher constructed (54–55). *A teacher summarizing and interpreting the text makes student reading unnecessary.* Choose good books that students can read and should like and then behave in class as if you expect them to be reading the books. For those who cannot read, your school should provide special remedial reading classes and other special student accommodations. Let fail those who can read but refuse to read, only because we know that if they have not read the text, nothing important for them has happened in the class—by *not reading* they are not becoming better readers and interpreters of texts.

McLaren notes that teachers who engage students in authentic rituals (such as reading) can expect that those rituals will exert both "centripetal and centrifugal pulls" (164). When most students actually begin reading and discussing the book, the centripetal force of those rituals will bind the class into a community of readers. However, the centrifugal force of *not reading* when most people are will (metaphorically) hurl those who can read but don't out of the community. Teachers can keep the community of readers from forming by making excuses for, ignoring, and ultimately validating students who chose *not reading.* While some students who do not read some portions of some books can survive in my classes, they cannot thrive—they cannot receive an A or B in the course. By taking steps to address *not reading,* many teachers can considerably reduce the portion of students *not reading* in their classes and ensure that those who don't read have their performance honestly, accurately, and properly evaluated, and noted by a poor grade.

Don't use film versions of books as crutches or rewards. If students know you are going to show the movie, especially if your class is focused on right answers about what happens in the story, then it makes sense to not read. Watching a film, with the right instruction, might make students more filmic or visually literate, but it will not, by itself, make them better readers or more likely to read. Further, the filmmakers have already made highly professional interpretations of the text, interpretations that stifle students' interpretations based on their readings. What student reader can conclude that Atticus Finch is a cold and distant father after viewing director Robert Mulligan and screenwriter Horton Foote's interpretation of *To Kill a Mockingbird?*

Don't make literature a right-answer game by assigning comprehension quizzes and tests or lecturing and testing over "received interpretations," which students must parrot back to receive credit. Study guides are also right-answer instruments that tell students that they should be noticing what the teacher or writers of prepared educational materials who made the study guide think they should be noticing. Study guides devalue students' readings and tell them

that what is really important is filling in all of the blanks on the study guide and memorizing that information for the test. Once students learn that it does not matter what they think, then copying the answers to the study guide or filling in the blanks based on Internet chapter summaries is a reasonable strategy. *If we do the reading and interpretation for students, we have no right to expect them to read the books.*

The same goes for making the structure of the novel or definitions of the elements of fiction the basis of a right-answer game. There is nothing wrong with presenting students with these terms and their meanings, because these are terms that help people articulate their responses to books. But do not overdo it or let testing on "climax" or "foreshadowing" become an end in itself. Mature readers read to *experience* the book, not primarily to analyze narrative style or dissect inventive authorial moves.

Encouraging Lifelong Readers

Many good students who have been successful in school have thrived using the strategy of *not reading.* Therefore it must be that many of the teaching strategies we have used in literature classes have allowed or even caused *not reading* to be the strategy of choice for these students. I know that some teachers reading this article will say, "I use study guides and lectures summarizing the assigned reading, but my students still read the books." Are you sure the students actually read the books? You might be surprised if you knew how many do not.

I will keep inviting my literature methods students to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it is the perfect vehicle for convincing future literature teachers that they must overcome the phenomenon of *not reading,* in themselves and in their future students. I will do all I can to ensure they accept this invitation to read (or reread) and proceed on their journey toward becoming lifelong readers and literature teachers whose students actually read the books.

Notes

1. To request journal and discussion item guidelines, please email the author.

2. I learned about student-generated questions and comments for discussion from Virginia Broz, who developed and refined this technique teaching eighth-grade literature.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Facilitating Student-Led Seminar Discussions with *The Piano Lesson*" uses August Wilson's play *The Piano Lesson* to invite students to ask a number of questions—big and small—about the characters, setting, conflict, and symbols in the work. After reading the first act, students learn how to create effective discussion questions and then put them to use in student-led seminar discussions before the second act and again at the end of the play. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/facilitating-student-seminar-discussions-30584.html

Ryan M. Rish and Joshua Caton

Building Fantasy Worlds Together with Collaborative Writing: Creative, Social, and Pedagogic Challenges

Inspired by the fanfiction genre, a teacher helps students create a world of interlinking stories and develop more detailed, sophisticated writing through in-depth collaboration.

Countless new planets, new worlds, and new lands have been created by science fiction and fantasy authors. They've given us heroic pasts and dystopian futures. They've taken us to distant galaxies and across magical landscapes. And in learning about those worlds, we may gain a little insight into our own. To help us better understand how authors in these genres craft their worlds, students in Swords & Spaceships are building their own.

These words along with a digital movie teaser appear on Josh's class wiki (Caton) as an invitation for students to enroll in his elective English course, Swords & Spaceships. In the class, students read fantasy and science fiction, as well as participate in Building Worlds, a writing project in which students create a fantasy world to learn about the choices fantasy authors make when telling a story. For example, the students read excerpts from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* and *The Lord of the Rings* to consider how to build a fantasy world from the top down (macro-micro), creating languages, races, and setting before writing the stories of the world; the students also read Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* and the foreword to *Tales from Earthsea* to consider bottom-up (micro-macro) world building, discovering a world along with your characters through the telling of tales.

The second time Josh taught Swords & Spaceships, he decided to change Building Worlds from an individual project to a collaboration using Wikispaces (http://www.wikispaces.com), a free wiki provider that caters to educators. By the end of the course, twelve students, grades 9–12, and Josh created their first collaborative fantasy world, Erstellen. Their world was composed of maps and drawings; historical narratives; descriptions of characters, creatures, and deities; and a system of magic. Josh introduced his students to the organizing principle of continuity, or having no in-world contradictions, in an attempt to redefine text as the result of a negotiated process among collaborators rather than the product of an individual. The project shared characteristics with online fanfiction communities (Black); e.g., students authored individual works coordinated with the work of others, read and commented on each other's work, and co-authored shared works with fellow students. The project also shared characteristics with role-playing communities (Hammer), e.g., narration, improvisation, and collaboration.

The Pilot Study

Ryan learned about Swords & Spaceships through a local newspaper article and worked with Josh to set up a pilot study of the last month of the class in May 2009. Ryan was interested in learning how students, who shared an interest in fantasy and science fiction, described their experiences with collaboration during the Building Worlds project. Ryan visited the class nine times over four weeks and interviewed nine of the twelve students about their participation in the project and their collaboration with other students in the class. During the

semester course, Josh reflected on his experience as a collaborator of the project and the teacher of Swords & Spaceships in an online blog (Caton). Over the summer, we discussed the students' retrospective accounts in preparation for a full study of the elective class, which we conducted the following school year.

Here, we present forms of collaboration that the students described during the pilot study and how Josh took these up in his teaching. Rather than conceptualizing collaborative writing as a skill students possessed to a greater or lesser degree irrespective of context, we considered how the social and writing practices that the students associated with collaboration were embedded in the social context of the elective class.

In the beginning of the project, relationships between students' regions of the world were mediated by a map graphic Austin created and posted on the wiki. After the map was posted, students claimed areas of the world; named and described their regions; populated their regions with creatures and characters; and began to write histories, stories, poetry, and lore.

We found Katherine Schultz's study of collaborative writing to be helpful in our discussions of the complex, socially situated forms collaboration can take. In Schultz's yearlong study of an urban elementary school, she learned that collaborative writing required a range of practices that involved negotiations of meaning and friendship. "Students wrote alone and shared work with others; they wrote in pairs or small consistent groups termed 'networks'; and they worked together to author a single text" (Schultz and Fecho 57). The students' forms of collaborative writing were specific to the particular culture of the classroom, "in which collaboration was explicitly taught, expected, accepted, and supported" (Schultz 283).

We used this complex, sociocultural view of collaborative writing to consider the different forms of collaboration the students described in retrospect. Individually, we looked across the students' interview transcripts for forms of collaboration described by multiple students. Together, we discussed these forms and reached a consensus about the three most salient forms of collaboration students described, which we present and discuss below. After each form of collaboration we discuss, Josh shares how he incorporated them into his teaching.

Collaboration as Maintaining Continuity across Story Lines

Most of the students provided examples of collaboration that involved negotiation and compromise in the interest of maintaining continuity across story elements of their fantasy world. Erstellen is made up of multiple single-authored texts that relate to one another in complex ways. Working toward resolving in-world contradictions was a primary goal of the project.

In the beginning of the project, relationships between students' regions of the world were mediated by a map graphic Austin created and posted on the wiki. (See a full-color version of Austin's map on the cover of this issue.) After the map was posted, students claimed areas of the world; named and described their regions; populated their regions with creatures and characters; and began to write histories, stories, poetry, and lore.

Some of these storylines were related in complex patterns; in the interest of maintaining continuity, some students negotiated revisions to each other's stories. Roger described one of these complex patterns as the Alliance Web, a series of storyline relationships forged by feuds and peace treaties among the characters and regions.

As members of this Alliance Web, Amelia and Austin created underwater elves who, despite their common origin, do not get along. Amelia explained her attempts to coordinate the writing of a shared history with Austin. For Amelia, continuity across the storylines was a priority and involved coordination.

> **Amelia:** Because [Austin] has underwater elves in a separate part of Erstellen. And so we had to collaborate a little while ago when we had to create a story about how we were cursed and how we separated. . . . That story took a lot of collaboration. We still collaborate, I tried to collaborate with him today, he did not want to. [laughs] But, um, yeah, we have to decide 'cause our stories have to match, accordingly. Or otherwise we'd have two different things going on at the same time that wouldn't make sense with everyone else's story.

The next interview excerpt demonstrates that coordination also involved negotiation and compromise. Roger and Clark were among the most prolific writers of the class; when Ryan asked Roger about ownership of ideas, Roger related an experience wherein Clark asked him to revise his story to represent the split personality of his king.

> **Roger:** It's like you didn't want, you wrote a story and you're proud of it and you don't want to change it because it messes with someone else's story.
>
> **Ryan:** Did you feel that yourself?
>
> **Roger:** Yeah, but I kind of just dealt with it I guess. Or I'd come up with things that I liked better.
>
> **Ryan:** Oh, OK.
>
> **Roger:** Like I wrote a story about Clark's region, and he kind of said I misportrayed his king. Like I had a really tense moment between his king and one of my characters where he is yelling at them, because his king is insane. And I put that his king was kind of like a tyrant in his insanity, and he said no he has split personalities, so I just kind of made the king talking to him one minute, like in shock, and then going absolutely insane screaming at him, and it worked out better.

For Roger in this example, maintaining continuity involved negotiation and compromise. Roger and Clark were both active in the maintenance of continuity in Erstellen, and Roger was willing to rewrite the dialogue of his story to accurately portray the king as Clark had intended.

Josh's Thoughts on Continuity Maintenance

One of my fears of a single-world, multiple-author approach to Building Worlds was that our creation would be disjointed and that authors would write in their own domains without making connections between the regions, characters, or stories other students invented. In an effort to encourage intertextual relationships, I required students to make discussion board posts on the wiki in response to each other's work. The goal was to encourage students to read their classmates' work and, in doing so, find common ground for their ideas, identify places to "overlap" their stories, and work out continuity conflicts.

My students made it clear, however, that they were not satisfied with wiki discussion board post alone; they consistently asked for time in the computer lab, where they could write and discuss at the same time. These in-class creative sessions were not what some might see as an ideal writing environment: they were loud and lively, with students shouting questions to one another across the room in between bursts of typing. Following one of these sessions, I noted on my blog how the creator of the Oras Plutitor region rethought his original plan after a prolonged in-class discussion; I am not sure how the class would have reached this consensus on the wiki.

Conversations about continuity provided the starting point for many collaborative ventures. Many students who initially contacted another student to have a continuity conversation ended up exchanging ideas.

Conversations about continuity provided the starting point for many collaborative ventures. Many students who initially contacted another student to have a continuity conversation ended up exchanging ideas. Early in the project, I often used the wiki's discussion board to point out potential conflicts and broker possible collaborative writing opportunities. As the project progressed and the world of Erstellen began to develop, students increasingly acted as continuity editors, clearing up conflicts not only in what was actually written on the wiki but also in what they intended with their writing or ideas (as the above example of Clark and Roger demonstrates).

Roger used the free program Terragen to create this representation of Mt. Laivan, a solitary mountain-island off the coast of Rebennen within the world Erstellen.

The idea of continuity maintenance has helped me think about how I can position students as readers and co-authors of shared writing in my more traditional English classes. For example, I have thought about how students could maintain continuity in collaboratively written persuasive and argumentative writing by identifying inconsistencies and contradictions in their shared writing.

Collaboration as the Borrowing of Ideas

Many students described collaboration that involved discussing ideas; some of these ideas ended up in students' stories and many did not. Students reported often not knowing where an idea came from that made it in their stories. Students also reported borrowing ideas from each other as a form of collaboration.

However, many of these ideas were based in popular culture texts such as movies, video games, fantasy and science fiction, etc. Students would comment on the stories of others that borrowed too heavily from an obvious popular-culture source to persuade them to make changes to the character or plot line so that it would be original.

Below, Rowan explained that for him collaboration involved borrowing ideas in many ways, e.g., discussing words and ideas with Clark, sharing an alliance with Roger, and sharing geography with Amelia.

> **Rowan:** Um, then like I connected with Clark with vocabulary, definitely. Definitely, he had really good vocabulary, and he's an underclassmen, so that's pretty good for him. And he collaborated with me with, actually, when we first started Erstellen and tried to make some species, the first things that came out of our mouths were werewolves and hawks. So, then me and Roger definitely collaborated a lot, definitely, because me and him are actually, um, allies, and so me and Amelia are too, because the ocean between Peradaban, the big, central continent and the islands is Vättenstad, which is her people's, and Alas Sea which I created.

Some of the students' practices of borrowing ideas involved writing a story that included someone else's geographical region. When asked about Josh's role as a collaborator in the project, Roger explained that many students used the region Josh created, Three Falls, in their stories.

Erika used pencil and water color for her depiction of Levone and her horse, Vendeval, of the Verflutchen region within the world Arterramar.

> **Roger:** [Mr. Caton] made Three Falls, now that I think about it, too. And that was a central part of the story that we all kind of took over, Three Falls after he made it. He kind of made its history and all that, and then we just kind of used it. That's connected with most of the people's stories. I think everybody has written a story that in some way involves Three Falls or Segilan, which is its counterpart.

By offering his own ideas and borrowing students' ideas, Josh established himself as a collaborator in the project.

Josh's Thoughts on the Borrowing of Ideas

A number of tensions arose when students were borrowing each other's ideas in their own writing. While some ideas floating around the world were

free for anyone to use, some students developed a sense of "territorialism" with ideas they felt were their own. Roger described this sense of ownership as "not wanting your stuff messed with." This raises an interesting question about who owned an idea that had been cultivated among several students only to take root in a few students' stories. This was a tension that I wanted them to wrestle with in consideration of the shared ideas and storylines among the authors of fantasy and science fiction they were reading.

In our traditional thinking of writing as an individual, solitary practice, two students "sharing ideas" might be labeled cheating. If a student does not cite the source of an idea used in a paper, we might consider it a form of plagiarism. When grading group projects in my other English classes, I typically craft rubrics that communicate expectations for individual achievement within the group precisely because I want to assess each student's personal learning and contributions to the group. The implicit message is that individual efforts are more important than what the group accomplishes together.

Therefore, when considering the emphasis on collaboration and sharing of ideas as something to be valued and encouraged in the Building Worlds project, I am uncertain about an appropriate way to assess student writing. I did not assign group grades for the writing of Erstellen. Regardless of how many student voices may have been involved in what was eventually written on the wiki, students received grades based on the thoroughness of their writing. Though my primary goal was to help students write with more specific detail and vivid description, I had no mechanism in place to assess how the sharing, borrowing, or recasting of ideas contributed to their writing.

As an English teacher, I find that though I am comfortable supporting and evaluating a single author writing a single text, I have less experience with evaluating collaborative writing. The wiki allows users to review the history of any of the wiki pages as a timeline of the authors' contributions and deletions. However, these archived drafts do not reveal the social aspects of collaboration that contributed to the writing. How can we support and evaluate students in ways that validate common efforts and collaborative products?

Collaboration in Consideration of Social Roles

Not all students in the Building Worlds project participated in the same ways. Some students such as Roger and Clark wrote lengthy descriptions and elaborate stories. Other students contributed ideas through class discussions but wrote little on the wiki. Some students wrote in complex collaborative relationships, e.g., the Alliance Web, and other students wrote individually with little involvement in other students' storylines. When Clark was asked about who he would have been willing to collaborate with, he explained that what a student has contributed to the project is an important consideration. Clark explained that he would have been more willing to work with other prolific writers such as Roger.

> **Ryan:** OK. But do you think that it would matter if, say Roger, approached you versus someone who had less to do with the project . . . would that matter?
>
> **Clark:** Yeah, it would.
>
> **Ryan:** How so?
>
> **Clark:** Um, Roger, his ideas spanned a lot more than other people did, and I think if someone were to approach me who had less to do on the project, then um, their idea would matter less, because Roger has a lot more influence because of the things he has done and contributed to the class.
>
> **Roger:** But for me, [continuity] was a big problem, because I wrote like the whole page about the gods, and then people would use, I basically made the characters for them, and people would use those characters in ways that kind of contradicted their personalities. And that kind of messed with me. I didn't like that. There wasn't much to do about it, because it was like their ideas from the beginning.
>
> **Ryan:** So, how did you resolve some of those things?
>
> **Roger:** I kind of made compromises I guess.
>
> **Ryan:** Oh, OK.
>
> **Roger:** Like with Jasmine's region, she wanted the main god to lift her people on to a flying island. And like the whole reason for that really conflicted with the main god's

> personality, because he wanted to leave things [as] open to free will as possible. And kind of leave the world to its own devices. So, we just kind of came up with different reasons for them to rise into the sky than what she had originally planned.

For Roger, making a compromise meant making sure Jasmine was using his god, Své, as he had intended. However, Jasmine valued Roger's opinion and related that she had regularly sought Roger's advice as a reader of her writing about Erstellen.

Collaboration was not always about the mutual exchange of ideas. Some students such as Roger had earned social capital among the students writing the Building Worlds project.

Collaboration was not always about the mutual exchange of ideas. Some students such as Roger had earned social capital among the students writing the Building Worlds project. Based on what students contributed and how active they were in reading and responding to each other's work, some students' ideas and advice were valued more than others.

Josh's Thoughts on Social Roles

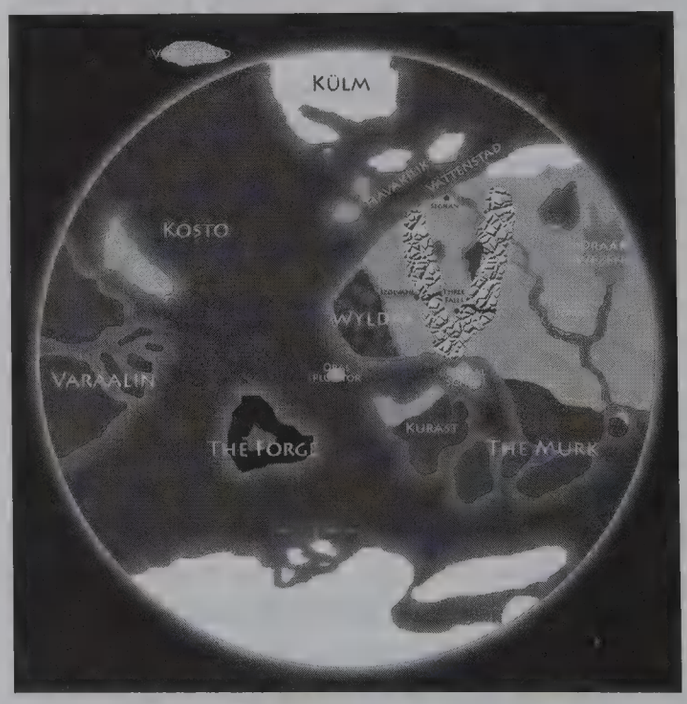
From the beginning of the creation of Erstellen, Roger was one of the "engines" of the project, posting the first regional profile. I was hesitant to use Roger's contributions as an exemplar for the rest of the students, as I did not want students to be intimidated or devalue their own contributions in comparison with Roger's.

I decided to go ahead and show Roger's regional profile to the rest of class in hope that his enthusiasm for the project would be contagious. A few days later Austin posted his map of Erstellen and students began claiming sections of the world and writing their own regional profiles. Roger's social role as project leader never diminished as he maintained his volume of writing and became active on the wiki discussion boards, serving as one of the chief continuity editors. Roger's opinion about the world in general and other students' writing specifically was valued by the other students.

As Roger's social role in the project developed into an unofficial leadership position, I began to reconsider my own role as a teacher in the Swords & Spaceships classroom. I attempted to alter my social role as teacher to a collaborator rather than an authority figure. I wrote along with the students; however, contrary to my previous experiences in which I would compose writing with students to use as an exemplar for them, my writing for the Building Worlds project was merely another part of the atmosphere of Erstellen. Some students took up my ideas, others did not. Likewise, I worked with some of their ideas and not others.

The students seemed to pick up on my shift in social role. I conducted a survey mid-semester that included a question asking if students saw me as a teacher, co-creator, guide, or project leader. The majority of students reported seeing me as either a co-creator or a guide. Through coordinated authorship, I took the opportunity to affirm and validate students' ideas and writing in a completely new way. For some students in the class, writing fantasy fiction that other students would read was a social risk. Rather than simply saying, "Hey, I really like that idea," I took it one step further, saying, "Hey, I like your idea so much I'd like to use it in my own writing." In this way, students' writing (and my own) was considered not only an individual product but also a contribution to a larger, shared project.

This coordinated authorship also helped me assist students in one of the primary goals of the assignment: writing fantasy fiction with detail,



The world of Erstellen by Austin Careins.

depth, and relatedness to the shared world. Collaborating with the students through my contributions to Erstellen gave me an opportunity to spur them on to new ideas for their own creations. My position as a teacher was nuanced as I was not just telling them how to go about the assignment; I was also completing it along with them.

The shift in my role as teacher from authority to collaborator and the students' reaction to it led me to wonder if I had been a more effective writing teacher because I was modeling and participating in the collaborative writing. I am a proponent of participating in the activities I assign in my classes, but I think that in this case my participation in the Building Worlds project was particularly important as we were experiencing and discussing collaborative writing for the first time. Typically, when I model writing for students, they see the finished piece, but not the process that I went through to create it (publicly available on the wiki). As a co-author, students could not only see my final, written product but also follow my process of generating ideas, negotiating continuity issues, and revising the work multiple times. This shift from my typical role as writing teacher contributed to a collaborative environment wherein the quality of the contribution to the world we were building was the primary concern. Some of my contributions were taken up not solely because I was the teacher, but because some of the students found them engaging or compelling and useful to enhancing their own visions for their work in Erstellen.

Our Thoughts about Collaborative Writing

Though this elective English class and the Building Worlds project is a special case, we found that it brought to the fore significant questions for English teachers to consider in regard to collaborative writing.

- *In what ways can we position students as readers and co-authors of shared writing?* Josh found that his students, who were accustomed to writing their own texts for a narrow audience, e.g., the teacher, needed suggestions, encouragement, and models for how to work together. To address these needs, Josh became a broker of collaborative writing opportunities, as well as a fellow collaborator, encouraging students to read each other's writing and consider how they might work together. The students found that this involved coordination, negotiation, and compromise—practices that came more easily to some students than others and often depended on the social relationships among the students.
- *How can we support and evaluate students in ways that validate common efforts and collaborative products?* Josh found that the approach he was accustomed to using when supporting and evaluating student writing as an individual process and achievement was not appropriate for the highly collaborative Building Worlds project. Even though the individual pages on the wiki typically had one author, the writing on those pages was often the product of collaborative exchanges between students, blurring the lines that typically separate "my writing" from "your writing." The origin of some of the ideas that the students were using across their stories was unknown, while other ideas were considered proprietary and required negotiation, consent, and oversight for their use. Josh found that the individual grades he was assigning failed to account for the complex social aspects involved with the collaborative authoring of the stories of Erstellen.

Collaborating with the students through my contributions to Erstellen gave me an opportunity to spur them on to new ideas for their own creations. My position as a teacher was nuanced as I was not just telling them how to go about the assignment; I was also completing it along with them.

- *In what ways should we reconsider our social roles when writing collaboratively?* Josh found that as students began to support each other's writing, his role shifted from an expert on fantasy and science fiction to that of a guide and a fellow collaborator. This role enabled him to approach a student as a writer who was looking for an opportunity to write with him or her, rather than an expert who was assessing the quality of a student's writing. Roger shifted into the role of project leader, according to many of the students, and was

primarily concerned with maintaining continuity across the stories. These role shifts help Josh learn alongside his students (Kajder) as they were all participating in collaborative writing for the first time.

One argument for the use of collaborative writing in our classrooms is that "collaboration is an important skill to learn in preparation for working with others in schools and the workplace" (Beach et al. 71). Another argument is because students are becoming increasingly familiar with digital tools and collaborative practices, or new literacies, in out-of-school contexts (Wilber) we need to reconsider the literacy practices (Street) we sponsor in schools. We argue that collaborative writing in the Building Worlds project helped to establish a social network (Kist) of student authors who shared an interest in fantasy fiction and came to support each other's writing in productive, yet complex, ways.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Fantastic Characters: Analyzing and Creating Superheroes and Villains" asks students to analyze and discuss familiar superheroes and super-villains to expand their understanding of character types and conventions. Students consider social issues they confront and incorporate those issues into the creation of their own superheroes or super-villains. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/fantastic-characters-analyzing-creating-30637.html

Joe Bucolo

Survivor: Satis House: Creating Classroom Community while Teaching Dickens in a Reality-TV World

A high school English teacher creates reality show–based assignments to encourage in-depth engagement with Charles Dickens's* Great Expectations *in a ninth-grade class.

Long before *The Hills*' Spencer and Heidi became "Speidi" and *The Bachelor* began handing out roses, Charles Dickens was populating his novels with memorable characters perfectly suited for today's reality-TV generation. So, I was not surprised to see my students making frequent comparisons between *Great Expectations*' network of characters and their favorite reality-TV personalities. Before long, I realized that I could capitalize on these comparisons by using them as yet another way for my students to "connect" to Dickens's classic novel—and each other.

My epiphany came one afternoon in the middle of a class discussion about Estella in *Great Expectations.* Snow was falling outside the classroom window on that particular Friday afternoon, and the ninth graders seemed more interested in the winter weather than in the inhabitants of Satis House. In an attempt to get their attention, I made a comment: "Seems like Estella is right out of *The Hills.*" It was as if I had spoken the password to enter their private world. Suddenly, all eyes were on me and students were asking, "You watch *The Hills*?" They began to sit up and come back to life, firing reality-TV questions at me as if they had just realized that teachers have televisions. Soon, our *Great Expectations* conversations gained a depth and enthusiasm they had rarely known, and the text began to come to life for my students in wondrous ways. In addition, we became a more close-knit community of learners.

Estella and Pip, by Harry Furniss, 1910, from *Great Expectations,* library edition.

Teaching in Installments

In "Stay Tuned for Our Next Episode: Teaching *Great Expectations* in Installments," I highlighted the benefits of teaching *Great Expectations* in installments, as the novel was originally published (Bucolo). This teaching strategy of studying one installment of *Great Expectations* each week for the entire school year offered myriad benefits, not the least of which was allowing my ninth-grade seminar students ample time to actually complete (and enjoy!) their reading assignments. To this day, the students still prefer this method of studying the novel.

In reflecting on reading *Great Expectations* in installments, Sam said, "We were able to see the changes in Pip's life while we were experiencing some of the very same changes in our first year of high school." Michelle added that she appreciated having nearly the same experience reading the novel as the people who read it when it was first published, and she found that it "added more suspense because we couldn't wait to find out what happened next." Tyler said reading the text in installments made the story more suspenseful.

In addition to some of the foreseeable benefits of teaching the novel in this manner, one unintended perk emerged as well. Studying the novel in installments turned my students' reading experience into one similar to watching a television series. Thus, the comparisons between the novel and the students' favorite TV shows seamlessly began to emerge. And the more personal connections the students made, the more engaged in the novel they became. Suddenly, reality-TV shows went from being a distraction from school work to being a support for it.

The Bachelorette Meets *Survivor*

When his readers first meet Miss Havisham, Dickens shares Pip's impressions: "In an arm-chair, with an elbow resting on the table and her head leaning on that hand, sat the strangest lady I have ever seen, or shall ever see."(Sounds like he's describing half the cast of *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*!) As readers quickly learn, Miss Havisham has plans for Pip—and for Estella. From the moment he sees her, Pip is smitten with Estella, beginning the on-again-mostly-off-again romance of "Pipella."And Satis House contains even more secrets than the *Big Brother* home. In the rest of the novel, students learn to "expect the unexpected" as they wonder whether this "bachelorette" will ever present Pip with a rose—and whether they will witness the "most dramatic rose ceremony *ever.*"

Studying the novel in installments turned my students' reading experience into one similar to watching a television series. Thus, the comparisons between the novel and the students' favorite TV shows seamlessly began to emerge.

"Pipella" is no ordinary couple, and theirs is no ordinary love story. In fact, they are constantly navigating the pitfalls that Miss Havisham and others place in front of them. And Estella herself continues to pursue a number of men around her. Pip's pursuit of Estella takes him from the loneliness of the marshes to the chaos of London to the isolation of debtors' prison in a series of ups and downs that the producers of *Survivor* would envy.

But nowhere are the dangers of *Survivor*'s island more paralleled than at Satis House itself. With appearances by Jaggers, Drummle, Orlick, and most of the Pockets, Satis House becomes a haven for secrets, mystery, revenge, and jealousy. Each time the novel's action returns to Satis House, the students and I begin to discuss who will survive the visit in an activity that we call *Survivor: Satis House.* In this exercise, students must articulate (first in writing and then in discussion) who the "winners" and "losers" are as a result of their experiences in Miss Havisham's home. In addition, students must discuss what values are being reinforced or diminished by the characters in the scene.

Beyond merely listing "winners" and "losers," the students must revisit the text to identify and annotate specific passages that support their selections. This process not only reinforces our study of argumentation but also provides opportunities to employ important reading strategies, such as annotation and prediction, while simultaneously examining author's craft.

In spite of their "mean girl" attitudes, both Miss Havisham and Estella teach readers some powerful lessons. Jose stated that Miss Havisham eventually showed courage by admitting her faults and apologizing. Maria added that Miss Havisham taught her that "you need to learn from your mistakes and forgive yourself, instead of dwelling on the past." Other students found that Estella showed them that a privileged life doesn't always lead to happiness. Through participation in *Survivor: Satis House,* the students view the text with a variety of lenses and discover modern relevance that might not have been readily apparent to them.

Food for Thought

In the short-lived reality show *My Antonio,* the main star ended every episode by giving his suitors their "just desserts." He used this activity to explain what he was looking for in a future bride and whether the remaining women possessed those qualities.

From that concept, my students and I developed an activity called Food for Thought. The assignment sheet explains, "The practice of 'breaking bread' with friends and family has been an integral part of societies since the beginning of time. In some cultures and religions, food has significance beyond simply providing nourishment. In fact, meals are the cornerstone of many holidays and traditions."

We participate in the Food for Thought activity every time *Great Expectations* provides a scene

containing a meal. On log sheets, we first identify who is present at the meal and then describe what the scene reveals about the characters and their values. Because the novel begins with the Gargerys and their guests sharing a Christmas dinner, Food for Thought is an activity that the students come to know early in the school year and continue to revisit frequently until the end of the year. By the time we have completed our study of the novel, students have a collection of documents, one from each significant meal in the text, that they can then examine to analyze how characters have developed throughout the novel.

Our collection of log sheets also serves as a springboard for other activities. When we examine how Dickens develops his characters throughout the novel, we revisit these meals to see how the main characters have changed from one meal to the next. Students are able to identify changes in characters' personalities, values, and viewpoints. We then return to the text itself to analyze Dickens's style and gain deeper understanding of his social commentary.

In addition, at several points throughout the school year (especially Thanksgiving), we examine significant meals in our own lives. We list who is present at our meals and then discuss what an observer would learn about our family, friends, and us by examining our participation in the meals. Students then have an opportunity to share these observations with one another, first in small groups and then with the entire class. It is a wonderful opportunity to build personal relationships and enhance classroom community. Consequently, Food for Thought has become an invaluably successful device to examine not only Dickens's characters but ourselves as well.

The Marshes

Combining the names of two members of a couple to create a name for the couple itself is a recent Hollywood phenomenon. For example, Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are simply "Brangelina" and Spencer and Heidi from *The Hills* are simply "Speidi." So when one of the students began referring to "Pipella," it only made sense for our class to create a Dickens-style show that we affectionately call *The Marshes.*

The Marshes is a classroom activity through which students seek to answer the question, "Who are the novel's super-couples, and what can we learn from them?" Throughout the year, students "check in" on the book's couples to see how they are evolving.

While "Pipella" (or "Estellip," if you prefer) is certainly the main focus of our attention, other couples worthy of study emerge as well. From "Clarbert" (Clara and Herbert), students learn what it means to be selfless, what true love looks like, and the benefits of having the right priorities in life. Amber believed that "Piddy" (Pip and Biddy) teaches us that sometimes people miss important things that are directly in front of them, and Jack, in a skeptical mood, added that "Drummella" (Drummle and Estella) teaches us "that the jerk always gets the hot girl."

We participate in the Food for Thought activity every time *Great Expectations* provides a scene containing a meal. On log sheets, we first identify who is present at the meal and then describe what the scene reveals about the characters and their values.

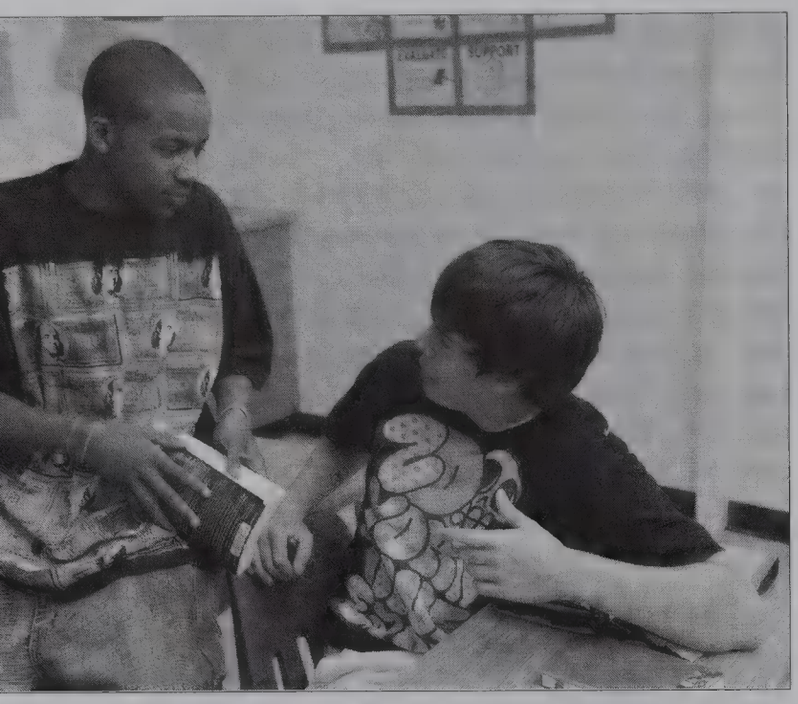
Again, the success of this activity is measured not only in the students' heightened interest in the novel but also by the depth of their understanding of human nature and what draws two people to one another.

Bromance

Not all of the book's significant relationships are romantic in nature. Pip's future with Estella takes a seemingly hopeful turn when he receives his "great expectations" from a mysterious benefactor. On his arrival to London, Pip meets Herbert Pocket, with whom he will share rooms at Barnard's Inn. The two young men realize that they have met once before and their friendship blossoms into a "bromance."

Herbert quickly becomes one of the students' favorite characters in the novel. In fact, every year students most often identify Herbert as the character whom they hope to emulate. Suzanne believed Herbert had a sense about him as if he were an outsider looking in. "He always kept his calm and tried to be logical." Monica added, "Herbert showed how being kind can pay off."

As Pip's BFF, Herbert provides Pip with not only an education about manners and etiquette



Thompson-McClellan Photography

but also about how to live one's life. Pete put it quite simply, "If your best friend is a lazy bum, you may have to be the brains and the brawn of the relationship."

Coming Next Season . . .

Just as television executives look back on the success (or lack thereof) of their shows to determine which ones to renew for another season and which ones to cancel, our class evaluates the merits of our various *Great Expectations* activities to determine which should continue and which should be replaced by new ones.

In addition, I give students the opportunity to "pitch" their ideas for Dickens-based reality-TV shows of their own creation. Daniel proposed *Cribs: The Greatest Expectations,* which examines the values of the characters in each of the novel's main settings, including Walworth, Barnard's Inn, the Forge, and Satis House. Mark's idea for a show, *23 and in Trouble,* follows the "troubles faced by a young, convict-harboring, lovesick boy."

Melissa proposed *True Life: I Burst into Flames,* which provides "a day-to-day account of Miss Havisham's life from her abandonment on her wedding day to the fateful day when flames consumed her." Finally, *Keeping Up with the Pockets* is Margaret's examination of Miss Havisham's relatives and how their priorities exist in our modern society. Other students' proposed titles include *Ace of Deception, Convict Love, The British Shore, Wheel of Expectations,* and *Neverlasting Love.*

Who knows? Maybe someday one of these shows will be picked up by a major network and help to keep Dickens's works alive for more generations to come.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Literary Characters on Trial: Combining Persuasion and Literary Analysis" invites students to brainstorm "crimes" committed by characters from a text. Groups of students work together to act as the prosecution or defense for the selected characters, while also acting as the jury for other groups. Students use several sources to research their case, and they write a persuasive piece to complement their trial work. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/literary-characters-trial-combining-799.html

Candance Doerr-Stevens, Richard Beach, and Elizabeth Boeser

Using Online Role-Play to Promote Collaborative Argument and Collective Action

Playing different characters in an online role-play, students explore controversial aspects of Internet filtering and adopt a plan to change their school's policy.

I'm realizing that a few students working together to create change on a subject they feel passionate about can actually make a difference, whether it be in the school or community.

—*Sasha, a participant in online role-play*

Students in Elizabeth Boeser's twelfth-grade College Writing class at Jefferson High School, in Bloomington, Minnesota, were upset that when researching various topics they were often unable to access important websites because of Internet filters. For example, one student interested in studying issues of gun control found that the NRA site was blocked. Another student, seeking clarification on MLA citation, typed in "Diana Hacker" and found that it was blocked due to the composition scholar's last name. These same students were also concerned about their perception that administrators in a nearby high school had suspended students after searching their Facebook pages to find photos of alcohol use. When given the chance to voice their opinions about these issues in class, the students often disagreed about how to address issues of Internet access and privacy. Like many other teachers, Elizabeth faced the challenge of how to channel these disagreements into a productive debate or "constructive controversy" (Johnson and Johnson 37) that, like Sasha voices above, would lead to collaborative problem solving—a process of exploring alternative perspectives on a problem with the goal of collaboratively developing a solution to that problem (Beach and Doerr-Stevens, "Learning").

Using Collaborative Argument to Address Issues

Traditional persuasive writing about controversial issues in the classroom typically involves formulating arguments and supporting evidence to convince a teacher, who serves as the primary audience. In contrast, collaborative argument involves students convincing a range of different audiences—in this case, one's peers and/or outside audiences—to accept their position through weighing the merits of competing positions, refuting arguments as false or not supported, and moving toward some recommended synthesis or solution as collective action (Nussbaum and Schraw).

One approach to fostering collaborative argument is through online role-play. Similar to other educational uses of online games (Sardone and Devlin-Scherer), online role-play requires students to adopt a range of roles representing competing perspectives on an issue. Students argue their positions over an extended period of time, which requires them to draw on the understanding of others' perspectives to build some consensus on possible solutions for addressing that issue.

Hosted on a blog or some other asynchronous discussion platform such as Moodle or Ning, these online role-plays offer students additional resources for participation and persuasion. One beneficial

resource in particular is that of time. In contrast to the often-superficial, verbal interaction of face-to-face debates, the asynchronous online role-play creates a space for ongoing conversation, where students post their stances on an issue and then respond to each other's positions. Asynchronous online role-play allows students extended time to reflect on each other's posts and to develop counterarguments. It also allows students to build alliances through identifying other roles with compatible positions. Use of online role-play also allows students to

Elizabeth also realized that students would be more motivated to participate in a collaborative manner if they knew that their role-play efforts might result in actual change in the school's Internet policies.

- Participate both in and outside of class.
- Construct fictional bio profiles for adoption of personas.
- Readily identify names and/or faces of participants on the screen.
- Send messages to everyone or selected audiences only.
- Link to other posts or online material.
- Revisit posts online for further reflection and writing.

Setting Up the Online Role-Play

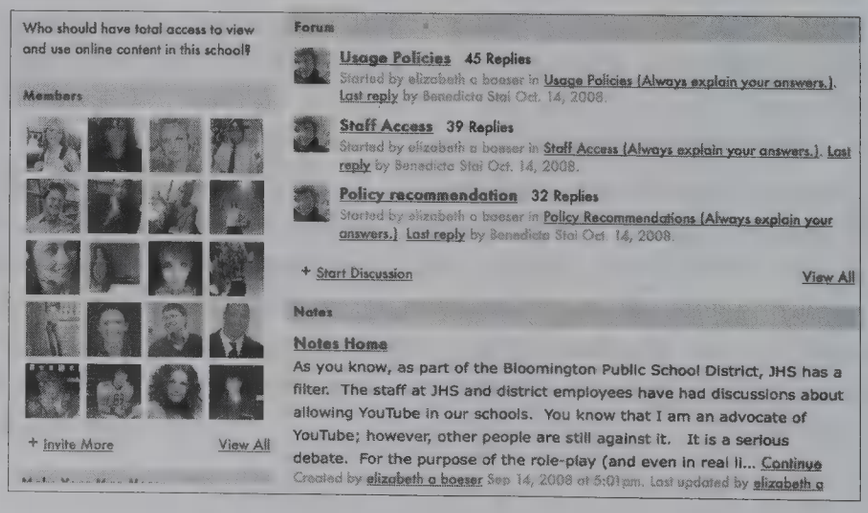
In response to her students' concern about Internet filters and online privacy, Elizabeth developed an online role-play using a Ning social network. The Ning included various features that allowed the students to develop their role-play personas with images and profile settings, while at the same time allowing her to set the platform to private and invited participants only (see fig. 1).

Elizabeth also realized that students would be more motivated to participate in a collaborative manner if they knew that their role-play efforts might result in actual change in the school's Internet policies. She therefore told the students that their online role-play would be used to identify problems with Internet filters and lead to writing position papers to communicate their policy recommendations to the school administration as well as the school technology coordinator, Mr. Wilson. Rather than simply being one more persuasive writing assignment, the students were using the writing during their online role-play to collaboratively explore and suggest changes in their school's policies.

To teach students argumentative strategies in an online forum, Elizabeth had students analyze and discuss role-play postings from a previous online role-play with attention to the development of their roles, statement and support of position, acknowledgment of counterarguments, and identification with audience. Students applied rubrics to assess postings based on these criteria, rubrics they would later apply to their own posts.

To enhance the students' exploration of Internet access and privacy issues, the students read Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother,* which portrays a young hacker coping with government intrusion in people's private information. Elizabeth then had the students research issues of Internet privacy and policy and choose several possible roles representing alternative perspectives on the issue, such as school administrators, parents, teachers, students, technology entrepreneurs, and lawyers. In some cases, students adopted perspectives that were different from their own. For example, a student who supported the school's Internet filtering system assumed the role of a student who, informed by a civil liberties stance, was opposed to the school

FIGURE 1. Ning Social Network Used for Online Role-Play Platform



filters, viewing them as an infringement of the First Amendment.

To begin the actual role-play, the students posted a fictional profile for their role-play character on the Ning. To avoid superficial stances on the issue, students were encouraged to view the development of their role-play personas as a way to build ethos, or credibility, within the role-play. Considering the "believability" in their persona development was among the criteria in their final evaluation.

Students then formulated their arguments over a three-week period through a series of postings on the Ning discussion forum. Students developed their arguments through posting forum entries, comments, claims, and evidence about the issue as a means to interact with other role-play personas. These comments and claims were then affirmed or challenged by other role-play participants, who then incorporated these ideas into their own claims, starting the process of verification over again. This repeated process of claim-verification-incorporation led to a continual building of knowledge about the topic through sharing of arguments, evidence, and reasoning via online sources.

While the online role-play progressed, various in-class activities were used to support the role-play participation. Students with similar positions informally caucused in face-to-face meetings to share strategies. To highlight the power differences among the characters during the role-play, students used Bubbl.us to create digital maps charting the roles' different stances and their perceived official status. Mapping the different roles helped students target roles whose positions they would challenge or with whom they could build alliances.

After the online role-play ended, students then stepped out of their roles and wrote a persuasive essay expressing their personal views on these issues. As a culminating event for the persuasive writing unit, the students then met with the school technology coordinator to learn about rationales for the school's current policies and to suggest changes in these policies.

Adopting Alternative Perspectives

Once the role-play was completed, the postings from the forum discussion and individual profile pages were analyzed according to the students' use of different language styles and perspectives, or discourses, and how these discourses interacted in ways that helped students to adopt hybrid voices (Beach and Doerr-Stevens, "Using"). While many of the initial role-play postings reflected stereotypical assumptions about their roles, over time, the role-play characters adopted alternative, nuanced perspectives on the issue. Instead of framing technology access as an either/or issue, the students began to perceive technology access and Internet filters as more than basic necessities to protect students from the evil of online predators.

They also began to perceive the need to protect people's rights to information or, in other cases, their rights to privacy in a world with continually shifting boundaries of public and private. For example, Sasha, the student who played "Judith Rosario," described her character as "Emo Girl," a girl with strong opinions and who always dressed in black. Sasha's initial role-play posting illustrates some of this character-based representation:

> Hello everyone. My name is Judith Rosario and I am a junior at Jefferson High School in Bloomington, MN. . . . I am by no means the most popular student in our school (nor would I want to be), but people know me. They see my short, pink and black spiky hair bobbing down the hall and they know trouble is coming at them if they get in my way. I don't take anything laying down. That's why I can't let the Internet stalking by our administration continue any longer.

As Sasha learned more about the complexities of privacy related to use of Internet filters, her perspectives began to shift. As she noted in a post-role-play interview:

> I began the role-play believing that administration's monitoring of student access was a good idea, but my opinions changed a little as time progressed. As I continued to write as Judith and research the topic more carefully, I came to see how a person could come to feel so strongly about privacy in the academic setting.

Recognizing the plurality of stances on the issue served to prepare students to consider the range of different perceptions that Mr. Wilson, the technology coordinator, was coping with in addressing the school's Internet policies.

Collaborative Argumentation

Exploring these alternative perspectives helped students engage in collaborative argumentation by moving away from competitive, either-or thinking, designed to simply refute opponents' arguments. Recognizing alternative perspectives leads to identifying points of agreement to achieve some consensus on how to address issues (Andriessen, Baker, and Suthers; Flower). For example, two characters in the online role-play, a student hacker (BL33K3R) and an ACLU Lawyer (Jeffery Schwartz), are discussing the current policies that affect Internet use in schools:

> Jeffery Schwartz:
>
> I applaud you, Bl33k3r on your knowledge of Miller v. California. Obscenity is always considered controversial because it is hard to define and subjective. . . .
>
> Two current laws that affect Internet use in schools are:
>
> 1. Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which requires schools and public libraries receiving federal funding to employ blocking technology to block obscene materials.
> 2. (This one has not been passed, but is still of interest) Deleting Online Predators Act of 2006 (DOPA), which will create further restrictions on sites like MySpace and Facebook, as well as online chatting programs.
>
> The ACLU and ALA brought the issue of CIPA censorship to the Supreme Court, but, unfortunately, the Court declared it constitutional because the restrictions were in exchange for federal funds. DOPA is a concern because it could limit educational applications on the Internet of resources such as Wikis and blogs, which are being used by some teachers in classes today. This is another example of how this censorship is hurting educational use of the internet.
>
> BL33K3R:
>
> Jeffery, I found your post to be very interesting. I read the article you cited under CIPA. Though the information may be somewhat correct I would not recommend in the future citing Wikipedia as a source. I did some digging into CIPA. The FCC was actually the driving force behind that piece of legislation. . . .
>
> The Child Internet Protection Act has strings attached to it. I know that is why the Supreme Court must have deemed that this act of censorship was constitutional. I find that absurd! That is just another way the government is twisting school officials' arms when it comes to internet access. . . .
>
> I must thank you for your research though Jeffery. It was very helpful to me. Though I am unsure on your stance on the issue. You provided good information but what is your position?

Exploring these alternative perspectives helped students engage in collaborative argumentation by moving away from competitive, either-or thinking, designed to simply refute opponents' arguments.

As these postings show, the students were more concerned about the issue of Internet access and privacy than they were about scoring rhetorical points to win a debate. The policy information shared in these two postings was quickly adopted and incorporated into the role-play postings of other students, taking the discussion of Internet policy and schools to a deeper level.

Collective Action

After three weeks of online role-play, experimenting with various perspectives, and collaboratively building knowledge on the issue, the students stepped out of their fictional roles to write a summary essay drawing on material from the online role-play. In this essay, the students adopted positions on the issue and proposed changes to the school's current policies with the school administration as a potential audience.

Through engaging in collaborative argumentation during their role-play, students identified relevant concerns, problems, and questions that were emailed to several employees of the school and district. They immediately received a response from the district tech staff, stating that the "safe search" designed for elementary Internet use had been accidentally placed on the high school network. This "safe search" filter was removed as a result of the student-initiated email. The students were both surprised and pleased that they simply had to raise a question and they received results. In addition, the technology coordinator, Mr. Wilson, agreed to visit the class in person, listen to the students' per-

ceptions and concerns, and explain the reasoning behind the school's security and filtering systems.

During Mr. Wilson's class visit, the students posed challenging questions. The student who played the role of BL33K3R compared the current Internet filtering to book banning:

> Isn't blocking sites that have educational use like the NRA or the KKK website similar to banning books? Books used to be the primary source of information but how can we key that up on the computer? Blocking website sounds a lot like censorship. I don't think that's fair. There's a Supreme Court case, *Miller vs. State of California,* 1973, that dealt with what was obscene and what was not. The findings of that court case could be applied to schools; can you use something like that or is it someone who decides on what's blocked?

In her question to the technology coordinator, the student uses information that she gathered from the online role-play to suggest changes in her real-world situation. In response to her probing questions, Mr. Wilson agreed with her that the blocking represents a form of censorship and went on to describe the book banning and Internet site blocking processes in the district. At this point another student asked about the inconsistency in these processes, pointing out that while Nazi websites are blocked by school filters, a copy of *Mein Kampf* is on display in the school library.

To this comment, Mr. Wilson responded with a larger reflection on the process of making change in the district and the need for students to voice their opinions to those officials who are removed from the classroom. He also noted that change is most likely to occur through collective action in which groups of people such as Elizabeth's students organize to propose change. This discussion with the technology coordinator led to a closer examination of the current Internet filters and policies. It also added support to lifting the school's block on the use of YouTube in classes.

Prior to these events, the students believed that they had no voice in influencing school policy. Even those who had been involved in the Student Council, debate, and other organizations assumed that they were simply expected to follow school rules without questioning them. The administrators' and Mr. Wilson's reactions led students to realize that their collaborative efforts in formulating convincing arguments afforded them a voice and power in the school.

The students were therefore doing more than simply writing persuasive essays for their teacher. They were engaged in writing for authentic audiences about how to improve their school, a practice that motivated them to reflect on which positions and proposals would most likely convince Mr. Wilson of the need for change. That they had already adopted and addressed the roles of administrators and technology coordinators in the role-play prepared them for addressing the actual administrators and Mr. Wilson.

In addition to writing for collective action, the students who participated in the role-play often noted how engaged they were in the activity, not only because of the novelty of online discussion but also because of the way it pushed their thinking on issues.

Participating in this online role-play led students to recognize how collective action that builds on different, even competing, perspectives can lead to actual change and bolstered their belief in collaborative argument for making change in their peer group, families, workplaces, and communities.

In addition to writing for collective action, the students who participated in the role-play often noted how engaged they were in the activity, not only because of the novelty of online discussion but also because of the way it pushed their thinking on issues. For example, one student noted that once other students started disagreeing with her claims, she had to think carefully about the variety of perspectives surrounding an issue. Another student noted that she normally writes from her own perspective, but in the role-play she had to recognize others' perspectives to move toward collaboration. In these cases, deeper engagement can lead to a more complex understanding of issues.

More Suggestions for Using Online Role-Plays

Based on our experiences using online role-plays to foster collaborative argument in our teaching, we propose the following:

Select relevant, familiar issues.

In setting up online role-plays, it is important to select issues relevant to students' reading or their lives in their schools/communities. Students are more likely to be engaged when they are arguing about issues that directly concern them, particularly when they can make policy recommendations and solutions for these issues to not only peer audiences but also to authentic audiences, who have the power to act on these issues, as was the case with Mr. Wilson.

When incorporating relevant issues, students do more than construct sound arguments; they build awareness of issues and empathy for the individuals involved (Freedman). Much like Shira Eve Epstein does when involving her students in social action literacy projects (61), this practice of perspective taking can inspire new social imaginations and be integral for engaging students in social action.

To build empathy, students must experience different perspectives on an issue. One advantage of basing an online role-play on a novel where students assume the roles of characters is that students are familiar with these characters' perspectives and stances on issues portrayed in a novel. In reading the novel *Montana, 1948* (Watson), Elizabeth's students addressed the issue of institutional racism toward Native Americans relative to the University of North Dakota's Fighting Sioux mascot (http://roleplaymascots.blogspot.com; http://mascotroleplay.blogspot.com). Another literature-based role-play involved the reading of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky), where students used online role-play to address issues of teen drug and alcohol abuse that were present both in the book and recent news stories about school administrator actions regarding Facebook and MySpace photos (http://wallfloweronline.blogspot.com).

Exploit online features.

While Elizabeth used a Ning social networking platform for the role-play, teachers can also use a classroom blog to conduct these role-plays, particularly if Ning, Moodle, Grou.ps, Grouply, or other online classroom management systems are not available or blocked. As we noted, one advantage of using a social networking platform is that students, drawing on their experience creating Facebook and MySpace profiles, can create fictional biographical profiles along with avatar images of their roles, an online practice that helps them define their persona or ethos constituting their rhetorical stance on issues. In contrast to the use of posts on a class blog, the threaded forum discussion format on a social networking platform helps students readily perceive relationships between claims and rebuttals. And, students can easily create links to relevant material supporting their positions and make comments on each other's profile walls.

Students can also create an accompanying wiki for collaboratively storing, organizing, and sharing relevant information and material related to a certain issue or text. And they can consult related online sites such as Debatepedia (http://wiki.idebate.org), Opposing Views (http://www.opposingviews.com), CreateDebate (http://www.createdebate.com/teachers), or Debategraph (http://debatemapper.com) that provide material on various issues.

Explore alternative modes of role-play.

Students can engage in collaborative argument through alternative online formats, for example, radio, podcast, or video townhall meetings such as the student-run townhall meetings on Northeast Public Radio, WAMC (http://www.wamcstudenttownmeetings.org). Students can participate in the Our Courts project (http://www.ourcourts.org) designed for middle school students, where students assume the role of a law clerk assisting a judge in writing opinions on cases. Or, students can participate in online games, for example, games on The Persuasive Games site (http://www.persuasivegames.com), Democracy (http://positech.co.uk/democrary/faq.html), Peacemaker (http://www.peacemakergame.com), LittleBigPlanet (http://www.littlebigplanet.com), or Global Warming Interactive (http://www.globalwarminginteractive.com/game.html).

Promoting Deeper Understanding of Collaboration

Through participating in these online collaborative argumentation activities, students consider multiple perspectives in ways that enhance their use of argumentative strategies. This collaboration promotes a deeper understanding of how issues can be addressed through sharing knowledge and lead to solutions to problems. This ability to problem solve

both collaboratively and at times virtually is essential for 21st-century communications.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

After brainstorming a list of local issues in "Communicating on Local Issues: Exploring Audience in Persuasive Letter Writing," students select and research an issue that concerns them, using Internet and print sources, and review the concepts of purpose and audience. They then argue a position on their selected issue in letters to two different audiences. Students work with peer groups as they use an online tool to draft and revise their letters. Finally, letters are published and sent. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/communicating-local-issues-exploring-945.html

Ross Collin

Career Portfolios: Whose Traditions Count?

How do students from different socioeconomic backgrounds differ in their approaches to career portfolio assignments, and how can the process be opened to wider forms of experience?

After Sunday dinner at my grandparents' farm, my family and I sat talking around the kitchen table. Much of the conversation revolved around my younger cousin and his upcoming graduation from high school. We asked him about his plans and he talked about enlisting in the service or enrolling in an auto repair program at the community college.

"But before I get to any of that," he said, "I have to pass finals and finish my career portfolio."

"Your what?" I asked.

"My career portfolio. It's like a binder we keep that's supposed to show who we are and what we've done and what we plan on doing with our lives. We have to fill it with papers and tests and stuff from outside of school. And we have to write essays on what the portfolio says about who we are and where we're going. Then, before we graduate, we show the portfolio at an exit interview."

"And what do you do there?"

"You talk to one person from the school and one person from town. They ask you about your portfolio and you explain how it shows your plan."

"It's like practice for a job interview," my aunt interjected.

"What do you think about this portfolio?" I asked, recalling James Paul Gee's description of the "shape shifting portfolio people" of the upper middle class. These "portfolio people," Gee explains, plot out their lives so they'll accumulate experiences that will look good on a résumé (105). That's fine as far as it goes, but I knew my cousin wasn't brought up this way. "Can you really show who you are and what you're into?"

"Well . . . I don't know. I put in a couple of tests I did OK on and a few newspaper articles from football and wrestling. . . . It's OK, I guess. I don't mind it."

The conversation shifted back to graduation, but I started turning over a few questions in my mind. How, I wondered, do students from different class backgrounds take to portfolio composition?[1] Do students in working-class families and small-farming families approach portfolio work differently from students in middle-class families? And what can educators do to help all students learn and critique this form and other important genres such as the writing portfolio (Harford), the research paper (Caillouet), and the college admissions essay (Wells)?

These questions coalesced into the basis of a two-year study of the career portfolio programs in place at high schools in two Midwestern communities: the rural, mostly working-class and small-farming community of Ford's Point and the suburban, mostly middle-class town of Glenview (all proper nouns are pseudonyms). Like a number of schools across the country (Drier), both Ford's Point High School (FPHS) and Glenview High School (GHS) require all students to compose career portfolios and discuss them at exit interviews. At each school, I observed class sessions where portfolio composition was taught; interviewed teachers; interviewed and studied the portfolios of six focal students; and observed these students' exit interviews. The focal group consisted of three boys and three girls; four upper-middle-class students, one working-class student, and one student who lives

and works on a small dairy farm and whose relatives perform working-class labor in the town of Ford's Point.

By pursuing this research project, then, I was able to develop answers to my questions about career portfolios and student difference. More generally, this project allowed me to reflect on the ways *all* writing assignments—not just those connected to career portfolio programs—invite students to present themselves and view the world in certain ways (and not others). Moreover, it enabled me to consider how particular ways of presenting the self and viewing the world are often more familiar to some of our students than they are to others. Thus, I contend, the arguments offered below speak to larger dynamics of identity and power that work through English classrooms from middle schools to universities.

Career Portfolios

At both FPHS and GHS, students compose career portfolios by bringing together résumés, personal essays, career planning materials, and artifacts from "core" courses, electives, and outside domains (defined largely as "official" spaces such as sports leagues and after-school clubs). Taken together, these items are meant to plot out students' paths through work and life. FPHS's primary instructional form, for instance, tells students the following:

> Your finished portfolio should make a personal statement about **who you were, are,** and **will be, where you are going** in the near future, and **how you plan to get there.** Each item should provide the reader with insight into your persona. (bold in original)

Likewise, GHS's form instructs students to compose portfolios that map their career trajectories and that demonstrate their personal and educational growth. Both schools, then, call students to present themselves as individuals who are in control of their futures and who have the drive and the experience necessary for realizing their goals in work and in life.

This type of self-presentation, teachers inform students, is crucial in the senior exit interview and in other formal interviews. Teachers explain that in such situations, students should use their portfolios to promote themselves to interviewers. Indeed, FPHS English teacher Mark Prasse identified self-promotion as the primary motive of portfolio composition. "Your objective," he told his students, "is to show the people—the powers that be—that you've been involved . . . even if you haven't been very involved. Think of this in terms of you wanting to make yourself look good." That is, Mark advised his students to present themselves in ways that might impress representatives of the school district and the community.

Mark's colleague Jason Weiss also encouraged his students to use their portfolios as vehicles for self-promotion. At the same time, though, he acknowledged the discomfort some students experience when describing their positive qualities and personal accomplishments. Addressing his class, he noted, "It's so tough because we—or at least some of us—were told not to talk too highly of ourselves, to be humble. Still do that—don't be cocky. But you really have to sell yourself here." This tension between humility and self-promotion, we will see, is experienced differently by different students.

Student Voices

Each of the six students I interviewed understood portfolio composition entails assembling items that will "make [them] look good" to interview panelists. More specifically, they understood they were to promote themselves by selecting items that indicate their success in school and in other "official" spaces. While the upper-middle-class students I interviewed found this unremarkable, a working-class student complained, "They want to see a person that's all academics, all goody kind of person." Asked if some students, responding to this call, misrepresent themselves in their portfolios, she answered:

> *Yes.* They want to be seen as goody two shoes. It's like, it's not who they *are,* though. It's like, yeah, there are some people where basketball is their life. And some of them only did it for high school and, like, they won't do anything about it afterward. . . . It's like, my portfolio, it's me, it's what I'm interested in. It's what I did well on. My portfolio is all me. Some people, I know, I can look at and I can tell it's not them.

In this statement, then, the student critiqued those who participate in officially sanctioned activities to build up their résumés. Rather than fill her portfolio with items that would please her interviewers and present her as a "goody two shoes" (i.e., a student strongly aligned with mainstream institutions), she included artifacts that demonstrate her "actual" interests and achievements.

When composing their portfolios, however, some students hesitated to cite interests and achievements that mark them as rural and/or from farming families. For instance, while drafting résumés, two FPHS students who live and work on dairy farms joked about their experiences:

> **Student 1:** (*cynical tone*) Did you put "milking cows"?
>
> **Student 2:** No. Why would I put that?
>
> **Student 1:** (*laughing*) Because that's all you talk about!

A few minutes later, Jason Weiss walked by and asked how their résumés were coming along. The second student said he didn't know what positive qualities he had that he could demonstrate on his résumé, eliciting the following:

> **Jason:** (*amiably; to students in the area*) He just needs a boost of self-esteem.
>
> **Student 1:** *(to Student 2)* You're good at milking cows.
>
> **Student 3:** *(laughing, to Student 2)* Are you putting "milking cows"?
>
> **Student 2:** (*annoyed*) No. I'm putting "Farm and Fleet."

In this exchange, then, students collaborated to construe farm work as less appropriate for representation in the career portfolio genre than paid work in the service economy.

The next day, a student in Jason's class expressed anxiety that she would come across as "trashy" (her term) if she included farm work on her résumé, prompting this exchange:

> **Jason:** You don't have to make it sound trashy.
>
> **Student:** So . . . ?
>
> **Jason:** How about "ranch hand"?
>
> **Student:** It's not a ranch. . . . I mean, I do chores and . . .
>
> **Jason:** Ah . . .
>
> **Student:** (*joking, officious tone*) "I remove crap from stalls."
>
> **Jason:** (*joking tone*) Yeah, don't say "remove crap from stalls."

Through their use of humor, then, Jason and his student (as well as the two students mentioned above) indicated they feel some of the realities of farm work are difficult to represent and are devalued in the portfolio genre and in the situations in which it is used.

Student Portfolios

Though students from different backgrounds viewed the career portfolio as a self-promotional genre in which "official" experiences are valued more than other experiences, they nonetheless produced different kinds of texts. Indeed, when asked what their portfolios reveal about them as people, upper-middle-class students offered certain kinds of answers and their less-affluent peers offered other kinds of answers. All upper-middle-class students participating in the study, for instance, stated their portfolios show they are well-rounded. Additionally, two of these students asserted their portfolios indicate they are able to balance several tasks at once; another noted her text reveals her interest in science; yet another middle-class student said his portfolio shows he is "artistic at all times." Continuing, he announced, "I want to be known as—I want to be thought of as different so I'll be remembered."

By contrast, the working-class and farming students noted their portfolios indicate they are hard workers. One student said her portfolio shows "I go after things one hundred percent and don't stop," and the other said his portfolio demonstrates that "[W]hatever I put my mind to I basically work as hard as I can on it. . . . And, ah, basically, work is what I think about almost all—not really all the time, but it's always in the back of my head." Additionally, both said their portfolios indicate they care about their families. "I've been taught family comes first," one student explained. "Everything else comes last."

Fittingly, both of these students designed portfolio covers that feature their families and

friends. The cover of one student's portfolio includes pictures of him playing with his nieces, while the cover of the other student's portfolio is filled with snapshots and senior pictures of her and her friends.

On the covers of their portfolios, three of the upper-middle-class students feature pictures of themselves standing or sitting alone. Two of these students, following the directions on GHS's instructional form, display copies of their senior pictures. An upper-middle-class student from FPHS, meanwhile, includes a multimedia text he created in the second grade: against a self-portrait in crayon is a photograph of him standing alone and a caption reading "I'm good at playing the piano and making mazes."

Distinguishing himself from the other five students in the study, the fourth upper-middle-class student includes on the cover of his portfolio three pictures of professional wrestlers from the 1980s. Beneath these pictures in large, bold type is the caption "[Student's] X-TREME Portfolio." This student explained in an interview that he created a bizarre portfolio cover both to express his dislike for the assignment and to assert his individuality.

In their introductory résumés, upper-middle-class students (except the fourth student) present more information than do working-class and small-farming students. More specifically, they list more extracurricular activities and more artistic endeavors than do their less-affluent peers (see fig. 1). While a résumé's item count and word count tell us little about its quality, they indicate in general how much experience the résumé writer can claim in the relevant domain. To emphasize one of this essay's main arguments, though, we should note here that there is nothing "wrong" or "restricted" about working-class and small-farming students' experiences or forms of expression. Indeed, the relative sparseness of their résumés is a function of the résumé genre's and the portfolio genre's modes of valuation: these genres rate the kinds of experiences typical of middle-class lives more favorably than they rate the experiences typical of small-farming and working-class lives.

While upper-middle-class students list more items in their résumés than do their less-affluent peers, students from different backgrounds include in their portfolios about the same number of papers, tests, and artifacts from "other" domains. Also, consistent with the career focus of their portfolios, all students feature disproportionate numbers of items related to their anticipated lines of work: an aspiring humanities professor includes several artifacts from English courses; an aspiring psychologist features items from different science classes; and an aspiring video game designer includes several art projects and a paper on the cognitive dimensions of gaming. Though all students include items signifying their involvement with official organizations, their selections reassert class divisions: the small-farming and working-class students feature items drawn from bowling, football, and 4H; the upper-middle-class students present artifacts from tennis, computer camp, and varsity choir.

These divisions reemerge in students' essays about their pasts and futures. In a paper similar in focus and tone to the goals essay written by

FIGURE 1. Features of Student Résumés

	NUMBER OF ITEMS AND NUMBER OF WORDS					
	UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS STUDENTS			SMALL-FARMING/WORKING-CLASS STUDENTS		
Student	1	2	3	4	5	6
Items	22 (2 pgs.)	28	16	11	14	11
Words	337	176	120	105	88	82
	NUMBER OF EXTRACURRICULAR/OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES, NATURE OF ACTIVITIES					
Total	11	7	14	3	3	6
Arts	2 (mult. yrs.)	1 (mult. yrs.)	5 (mult. yrs.)	0	0	0

the student from a small-farming/working-class background, one working-class student writes that she wants to be a psychologist or a registered nurse and that she wants to remain close with her family and friends. Throughout her essay, she stresses the importance of hard work: "I want to be able to say, 'I've worked to get where I am' and that I'll continue working to get what I want." Also, she frames her plans as being contingent on unknown developments. For instance, she begins her paper with the question, "Who actually knows that they are going to be around in the next five, ten or even fifteen years?" and concludes her introductory paragraph with the statement, "Everyone has goals and a future and here is what I *hope* my future *turns out* to be" (italics added). Discussing her plan to enroll in a technical college and then transfer to a state school to study psychology or nursing, she writes, "I know its going to take a lot of motivation, determination, hard work, and lastly, money." Given these realities, she states, her future is unlikely to be easy: "I'm going to need to go out and experience some more of the hardships of life." She notes, however, she will not be alone in her struggles: "I do know this though: I will have my family support to get me through tough times." Thus, she presents daily life as demanding hard work and sacrifice and describes her future as "turn[ing] out" in unpredictable ways.

In their essays, then, upper-middle-class students describe themselves as being driven by internal dynamics (e.g., personal ambition and enjoyment) and as being in control of their destinies, whereas small-farming and working-class students present themselves as endeavoring to achieve external goals (e.g., employment and financial stability) and as adjusting to forces beyond their control.

By contrast, the upper-middle-class students' goals essays focus on their individual interests and emphasize their control over their futures. One upper-middle-class student, for instance, uses his essay to plot out a personal trajectory that will carry him into work as a video game designer. Noting his longstanding interest in this career (this is the student who described himself as "good . . . at making mazes") and expressing confidence in his ability to attain his goals, he writes, "My aspiration since middle school has been to create puzzles and challenges in a video game format; I am glad this occupation is within my reach." He chose this career, he writes, because it aligns with his own tastes and preferences: "I would like to be a level designer because I enjoy creating artistic environments which allow players to interact with the virtual world in a meaningful way." Describing the past experiences that position him to realize his plans, he notes, "My background, so far, has prepared me to fulfill my goals." In the conclusion to his paper, he states,

> My plans are all converging to help me reach my final goals. The classes, contacts, and camps of today are instrumental helping me later in my career. My plan for college should put me into good standings for a position as a video game developer. I believe my goals are attainable, and I am determined that I will achieve those ambitions.

Significantly, this student frames his acquaintances (contacts) and experiences (classes and camps) as instruments that will help him achieve his personal objectives. More generally, he describes himself in this passage and throughout the essay as moving with confidence toward his career goals (internalized in the final sentence as personal "ambitions").

In their essays, then, upper-middle-class students describe themselves as being driven by internal dynamics (e.g., personal ambition and enjoyment) and as being in control of their destinies, whereas small-farming and working-class students present themselves as endeavoring to achieve external goals (e.g., employment and financial stability) and as adjusting to forces beyond their control. Furthermore, while upper-middle-class students construe their relationships with others as serving their individual goals, small-farming and working-class students frame their relationships with friends and family as being informed by principles of mutual aid.

When asked at their exit interviews to discuss their portfolios and their future plans, middle-class students offered elaborated descriptions of their individual trajectories and the "classes, contacts, and camps" helping them along the way. Praised by interview panelists for their ambition and poise, these students assumed comfortable postures and laughed and smiled easily (as did their interviewers). Small-

farming and working-class students, by contrast, deferred to their interviewers and provided short, direct statements. They sat up straight on the edges of their chairs and smiled nervously when interviewers complimented them on their hard work. Thus, once again, they showed themselves to be less comfortable with self-promotion than their middle-class peers.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Discussing FPHS's portfolio program, Jason Weiss reflected on small-farming and working-class students' lack of familiarity with genres of self-promotion:

> But, and it's hard for . . . I guess . . . . When have they ever seen a need for any of those . . . those qualities to be put onto a résumé? You know, if their father's a farmer, you know, family of farming, what has been the need for a résumé along the way, anyhow? So I think [portfolios] do invalidate their—the qualities they have. They may know how to fix the tractor, which will get them a job in the automotive, you know, whatever. But, for them, that's just kind of a way of life. And I, this is coming from my own, but as somebody who's more in the professional side of things, every little thing you do becomes a résumé item, you know?

Thus, Jason argued that the portfolio genre calls small-farming and working-class students to present themselves and their ways of life in an unfamiliar form. While such forms of self-presentation may be unfamiliar to many of these students, he continued, they seem natural to those "more in the professional side of things."

Along with questions of form, though, come questions of ethics. Indeed, to compose a "good" career portfolio, students must do more than select a few papers and tests; they must also arrange and describe these items in ways that will convince interview panelists they are self-sufficient individuals following their own path into an exciting career. Thus, central to the process of portfolio composition is an ethic of self-promotion.

As suggested above, though, upper-middle-class students seem more comfortable promoting themselves to institutional authorities than do small-farming and working-class students. In her writing on this topic, sociologist Annette Lareau associates this difference with differences in family histories in workplaces and in other important institutions. While self-assertion often helps middle-class parents get ahead at work and in institutions dominated by the middle class, Lareau writes, working-class parents seldom find self-assertion so effective in official spaces. Thus, middle-class parents often teach their children to assert themselves within institutions and working-class parents often teach their children to defer to authorities (and, perhaps, to challenge them under the radar) (163). Relative to their less-affluent peers, then, middle-class students may develop a surer feel for the game of self-promotion.

Significantly, four of the five teachers I interviewed at GHS and FPHS acknowledged the portfolio genre privileges the experiences and ethics of middle-class families over those of small-farming and working-class families.

Significantly, four of the five teachers I interviewed at GHS and FPHS acknowledged the portfolio genre privileges the experiences and ethics of middle-class families over those of small-farming and working-class families. Given their concern with the biases built into the genre, these teachers might consider joining administrators, students, and parents in revising their schools' portfolio programs. Working together, they might widen spaces in the portfolio for students to represent their involvement in different kinds of communities and their performance of different kinds of work. For instance, teachers might prompt students to include items that show how they contribute to work carried out on family farms, in religious communities, and in volunteer organizations. Additionally, educators, students, and parents might talk about the biases built into the career portfolio and other genres. They might explore how certain genres value certain ways of life and certain forms of self-presentation more than others. More importantly, they might discuss how such biases can be worked around or changed. For example, they might examine the genre of the career portfolio and ask questions such as, "Whose traditions and values are endorsed in this genre and whose are left out?" "How can we change the

rules of the genre so other ways of life may be represented?" "If we change this genre (i.e., the career portfolio), how should we change the situations where the genre is used (i.e., the senior exit interview)?"

While these questions might help reorient educators', students', and parents' work with career portfolios, they might also help reframe their engagements with other genres used at school, at work, and in the public sphere. Indeed, educators, students, and parents might question and work to reform genres such as the book report, letter home to parents, office memo, injury report, petition, statement before the school board, and so on. Through examining and revising these genres, they might not only learn about the genres they use to organize their lives but might also make these genres more accessible to more people. In so doing, educators, students, and parents might go a long way toward making their schools and their communities more equitable places.

Note

1. I see class as "an identity and a lifestyle, a set of perspectives on the social world and relationships in it" (Ball 6). These identities, lifestyles, and perspectives are developed by groups operating in particular material and cultural contexts.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The author was looking for alternatives to the traditional career portfolio. "Book Report Alternative: Creating Careers for Characters" could fit that need. Students first explore résumés using the Internet. They then work as a class to construct a sample résumé for a character in a book they have all read. Next, they explore want ads and online job sites for possible jobs for a character from a book they have read on their own, and they write a letter of application and create a résumé for their character for the selected job. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-creating-245.html

Lauren Gatti

Seriously Popular: Rethinking 19th-Century American Literature through the Teaching of Popular Fiction

A teacher breathes new life into canonical works—such as those of Hawthorne, Melville, and Longfellow—by asking students to examine the differences and similarities between their own reading tastes and those of 19th-century American readers.

It comes up every year as students slog through Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" or *The Scarlet Letter*: "This is boring." While I couldn't disagree more with their assessment and try hard to breathe life into Hawthorne's work, I cannot deny that reading Hawthorne is *hard,* and that the jump from hard to "boring" is not far for most students. The problem is that their assessment of "boring" can mean so many things. From a skeptic's point of view, this indictment amounts to an admission of guilt: the students did not read the book at all, or did so in a cursory manner. But if we take a more generous approach, we could assume that maybe, just maybe, the students actually tried but failed to understand what Hawthorne possibly meant when he wrote, "They averred, that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth tinged in an earthly dye-pot, but was red-hot with infernal fire, and could be seen glowing alight, whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night-time" (Hawthorne 79). As Cris Tovani points out in her book *I Read It, but I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers,* struggling readers often mask their frustration with the pat response, "It's boring," or really do experience boredom as a legitimate consequence of not having good reading comprehension strategies at their disposal. I tended to read struggling students' reactions as being in line with this latter reading.[1]

But what about the students I taught who did not generally struggle with reading, but had the same reactions to Hawthorne? These students' reactions, taken together, point to a layer we often gloss over as teachers: taste. What *do* our students expect from the books they read? And that question surfaces a related one about readers in Hawthorne's time: What did *19th-century* readers expect from their texts and how did Melville's and Hawthorne's work address or interact with those expectations? Curious about the connections between my students' reading tastes and those of 19th-century readers, I read Nina Baym's excellent text *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* to gain a sense of how readers in the 1800s might have thought about the texts that they read.

Nineteenth-century readers wanted their novel to be a "story proper" (or a "novel proper") with a beginning, middle, and end. There could be complicated action and nonlinear events, but the events needed to cohere; plot was essential (Baym, *Novels* 71). Novels should not be allegories because allegories were too simple; similarly, characters should develop and not simply be vehicles for concepts (92). Because novels should seek to improve us as people, they should have some kind of moral or "meaning" (we call this "theme"), but the narrator shouldn't overtly moralize (126–27): "A novel of good moral tendency created love and esteem for one's fellow human beings; one of bad tendency made for misanthropy" (176). Dialogue—or "conversations" as it was called in the 19th century—should be "spirited and thoughtful" and should be believable for the character speaking.

To see where my urban high school students lined up with Baym's synthesis of what 19th-century readers looked for in novels, I generated a

chart outlining her findings and asked students to agree or disagree, making sure to provide reasons. I was surprised to find a strong overlap: the students' surveys revealed that they also wanted to read novels for pleasure; that believable and natural dialogue was central to a book being a "good read"; that novels should have an identifiable plot (a beginning, middle, and end); and, finally, my students agreed that allegories were uninteresting as novels (which certainly helped me understand their aversion to excerpts of *Moby Dick*). Once I had a deeper sense of the reading tastes that underpinned my students' approach to writers such as Hawthorne and Melville, I was better prepared to confront this openly, using their frustrated question "Who actually read this stuff?" to frame the unit and drive our conversations on mid-19th-century American literature.

Approaching mid-19th-century texts through this literary historical lens enables us not only to contextualize texts in more interesting and robust ways but also enables us to engage our students with the controversial and fiery debates around the canon: Why, for example, if no one liked or read Melville when he was writing, should *we* be interested in reading him now? If he was "misunderstood" in his own time, his genius unrecognized to the masses purchasing books, does that logic hold for writers who are not regarded as "serious" today? Who decides what we read and what is good and with what reasons? As English teachers we know that these canonical debates are the meaty, engaging stuff of literature; it is part of what keeps us talking and thinking about what is "good" and what is "worthwhile." Thus, by choosing to complicate, historicize, and reframe our 19th-century American literature units through the inclusion of 19th-century popular fiction, we are allowing our students to take part in important debates that we as English teachers and readers enjoy. As a result, all students, not just those in Advanced Placement classes, are invested in a deep and engaging exploration of the canon.

Approaching mid-19th-century texts through this literary historical lens enables us not only to contextualize texts in more interesting and robust ways but also enables us to engage our students with the controversial and fiery debates around the canon.

Seriously Popular: The Reading Tastes of 19th-Century Readers

So who *was* reading Hawthorne or Melville in the 19th century? It's not such a silly question. After all, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* sold a meager 7,800 copies of the 10,000 printed during his lifetime, netting him a whopping $1,500 in 1864 (Baym, "Introduction" vii), which, in today's currency, would amount to approximately $21,000. Hawthorne, who had been drawn to popular fiction when he was a child, yearned for success in the reading world (viii). Yet he couldn't quite laud all contemporary literature. When the reading public went crazy over Maria S. Cummins's 1854 novel, *The Lamplighter,* Hawthorne famously declared to his publisher, William Ticknor,

> America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of *The Lamplighter,* and other books neither better nor worse?—and worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000. (qtd. in Showalter xxxv)

And as for Melville's *Moby Dick,* a tome dedicated to his friend and mentor, Hawthorne, the numbers are decidedly more modest: 3,000 copies were printed, and by the time Melville died, not all of them had sold.

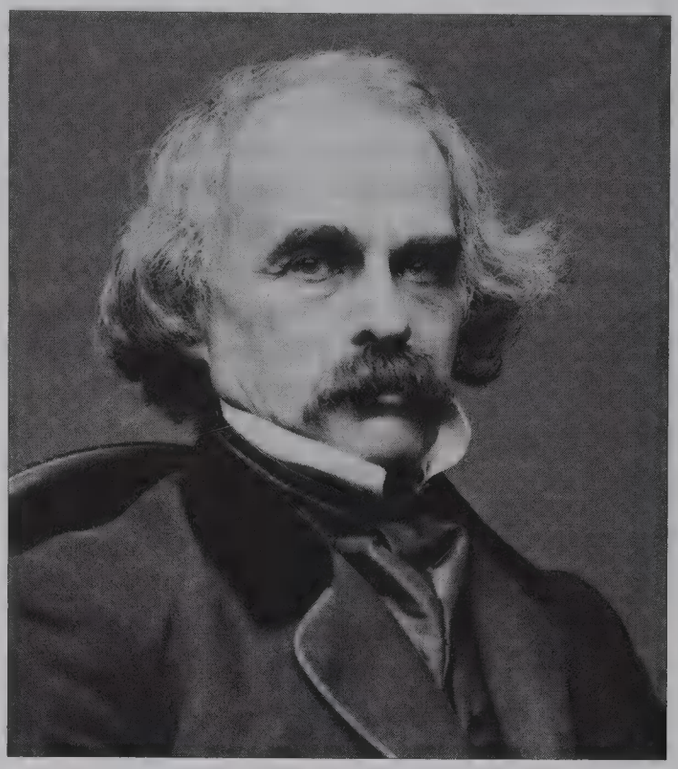
The Lamplighter, on the other hand, Cummins's book that elicited Hawthorne's scathing critique of "scribbling women," was a text that deeply satisfied 19th-century readers' expectations and reading tastes. This book about an orphan girl, Gertie, who was rescued by Trueman Flint, a lamplighter, from a terrible life of mistreatment, was called by *The Knickerbocker* "one of the most original and natural narratives we have encountered in many a year" and promised that "you will rise from its perusal with a purer and more elevated idea of human nature" (Williams 72). The *Boston Daily Atlas* concluded (with emphasis added by Cummins's publisher) that its author "has evidently a highly *cultivated* and *refined* as well as an *original* and *imaginative mind,* and writes with the ease, the *classical correction of diction,* and that choice selection of

terms which indicate the *good English scholar*" (Williams 72; italics in original). Cummins's book was only second to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in popularity.

Cummins was not the only writer who trumped Hawthorne. While Hawthorne struggled to pry the reading public from the magnetic pull of "scribbling women," Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was enjoying unprecedented success as the most popular 19th-century American poet. Given the marginalized status of Longfellow in American literature curricula today, it might be hard to imagine that Longfellow's popular success during his lifetime makes other popular writers of the day pale in comparison. His epic poem, *The Courtship of Miles Standish,* sold 25,000 copies in two months in the United States and 10,000 copies in London *in one day* (Basbanes 2). Part of what made Longfellow so irresistible to the reading public was his accessibility and his ability to tell good stories.

Longfellow was the writing contemporary, rival, and/or friend of most of the canonical American writers that now hold court in our textbooks. It is therefore odd that there is little, if any, space in textbooks dedicated to the relationships, conversations, and interactions that these writers had with one another. Christoph Irmscher's compulsively readable *Longfellow Redux* explores these relationships in utterly compelling ways. For example, Poe interpreted Longfellow's reliance on European traditions and his co-opting of traditional stories and poems as downright plagiarism (Irmscher 15; Poe would later be accused of this same thing). Melville considered Longfellow to be unoriginal; Whitman derided Longfellow as the "expresser of common themes" and a "singer of little songs of the masses" (Irmscher 58). That said, Whitman had no choice but to review his own book, *Leaves of Grass,* while Longfellow's poem *The Song of Hiawatha* was an immediate hit, selling 50,000 copies in 1857 (Irmscher 11). Hawthorne, on the other hand, appealed to Longfellow, his 1825 classmate at Bowdoin, to review *Twice Told Tales* for *The North American Review,* which Longfellow did with his characteristic generosity despite the fact that they had been more acquaintances than friends during college (Wineapple 95).

Not only were Longfellow's poems a smash hit with the reading public at large, but they also



Photographic portrait of Nathaniel Hawthorne by Mathew Brady, circa 1860–1865. Library of Congress.

became fixtures in 19th-century American classrooms, a sure irony given Longfellow's invisibility in classrooms today. In her book *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865–1917,* Angela Sorby traces the pedagogical function of Longfellow's poetry (as well as Whittier's and Dickinson's) in American classrooms throughout the country. Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), for example, was an extraordinarily popular text for children learning how to read. Students would later encounter performances of this poem throughout their lives as summer camps with Indian themes became popular (Sorby 8). Sorby explains that "[t]hrough the schools, *The Song of Hiawatha* made the homeland visible and audible to students—not as a map or a chart but as an archaic point of origin that could never be changed or defiled, and that could always be revisited through repetition" (10).

Irmscher explains that over the course of his life, Longfellow penned more than 20,000 letters to the fans who wrote to him, writing up to 20 letters a day. (Whitman, on the other hand, was often annoyed by the letters he received from fans, responding to them inconsistently [Irmscher 34].) The mass of correspondence Longfellow received actually

haunted him in his dreams, and when Longfellow died, his friend and fellow poet John Greenleaf Whittier speculated that it was answering fan mail that ultimately killed him (Irmscher 35–36). Some of his correspondents? The King of Brazil and Laura Bridgman, a prize pupil at the Perkins School for the Blind. It would be easy to dismiss Longfellow's popularity as a sign of his vapidity. On the contrary, Longfellow tapped deeply into something that 19th-century readers wanted and needed, so much so that they wrote him time and time again to tell him that his poetry had soothed and inspired them.

So why was it that Longfellow, the most celebrated and widely read American poet of the 19th century, has fallen out of the canon, while Hawthorne, who was not widely read at the time, ascended to near-sacred status?

Using Longfellow and Hawthorne to Catalyze Canonical Debates

So why was it that Longfellow, the most celebrated and widely read American poet of the 19th century, has fallen out of the canon, while Hawthorne, who was not widely read at the time, ascended to near-sacred status? This was the question that 30 English teachers from around the country and I explored at a three-week National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) seminar in 2006. The short answer, according to Irmscher, is that the modern aesthetic of difficulty, represented most clearly by modernist writers such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (who believed himself to be a distant relative of Longfellow, by the way), made the accessibility and conventionality of Longfellow appear "unacademic" and trite. Irmscher points out, "Longfellow wrote poems that were meant to be enjoyed. Storytelling, unfortunately, goes against the modernist belief that in order to be any good a poem has to be concise and compressed, and difficult to figure out" (qtd. in Basbanes 3). And this debate is not confined to the past: we see it in language arts and English classrooms as teachers, parents, and even students debate the worthiness of *The Kite Runner* or *Twilight* or fan fiction.

This question of what is "worthwhile" goes beyond the American literature curriculum and into print or online media. Some narratives and myths dominate while others take a backseat. It is the common phenomena of stories that we tell, remember, and value. In American literature, texts from writers such as Cummins and Longfellow recede and disappear, thereby becoming occluded. In their article "Common Belief and the Cultural Curriculum: An Intergenerational Study of Historical Consciousness," Sam Wineburg, Susan Mosborg, Dan Porat, and Ariel Duncan write that "Occlusion stands opposed to collective memory. It speaks to that which is no longer 'common knowledge,' no longer easily retrieved or taken for granted. The connotations that attend to this term—partiality, opacity, blockage—ask us to think about the stories, images, and cultural codes that have become muted in the transmission from one generation to the next" (66). We take our collective memory of a particular text or author—Whitman or Melville, for example, as being the "most American" of writers—as the only truth, rather than investigating the ways that these texts functioned in, circulated in, or represented the actual literary and historical moment of the 19th century. Our memory trumps history. Investigating why stories become occluded is the million-dollar question, to be sure. But what I would like to think about, instead, is what gets missed when certain stories get occluded.

Unlike the thorny debate about how to teach Columbus in history class, for example, choices regarding teaching material for English classes are less overtly loaded, but they are, like all curricular choices, loaded nonetheless. Whose voices are represented, whose identities validated are curricular flashpoints. To a certain extent, the centrality of textbooks within curricula work to delimit meaty conversations about who is taught and why. Indeed, textbooks often work to render this debate invisible, in part because the tacking on of secondary narratives under the guide of "For Further Reading" gives the illusion of inclusion. (How many students have actually pursued these suggestions?) By relegating these other texts, authors, and histories to the bright, glossy boxes in the margin of a textbook page, the editors' attitudes are clear: these are important to acknowledge, but not important enough to study. And when we disarticulate a 19th-century text from the literary and social historical contexts out of which the texts were born, we unwittingly decontextualize and simplify the texts we wish to complicate. The

inclusion or exclusion of texts indexes our attitude toward what is important and, as a result, informs our students of what is "true," "worthwhile," and "relevant." Their understanding of the "America" of their American literature courses is largely contingent on our curricular and pedagogical decisions. And this is no small thing.[2]

Complicating the Canon with and for All Students

One can approach complicating the canon in American literature in a multitude of ways, from a wholesale reframing of the curriculum, to the juxtaposition of contemporary and historical texts, to approaching chosen American literature units through the lens of literary and social history. When I taught this unit on mid-19th-century writers, I chose this last approach. I began by giving the survey on 19th-century reading tastes to the students to establish a starting point in terms of what they were expecting from their texts. After we discussed and compared their reading tastes to those of 19th-century readers, we went on to read excerpts of *Moby Dick,* discussing the ways in which they might approach a review of the text as well as the ways in which a 19th-century reader (as described by Baym) might have reacted to this text. I then used these reviews in conjunction with actual reviews of *Moby Dick* to illustrate a larger point about reading tastes: finding the text uncompelling or uninteresting might not simply be a matter of "not getting it." This activity allowed us to see that the students were not the only ones who found the book difficult to read and understand: their reviews matched, almost identically, some of the critiques of the book during Melville's life. Soon my students began to see that their struggle to understand Melville's psychologically and symbolically complicated language was not a reflection of their ability to read or their intelligence, but actually a result of many factors including their reading tastes.

Next, we moved onto juxtaposing Hawthorne and Cummins, one of the "scribbling women" at whom Hawthorne directed his frustration. Because we had already spent a good deal of time reading and discussing *The Scarlet Letter,* the students were already familiar with the book's dense language and rich themes of sin and hypocrisy. Thus, after reviewing what we knew about Hawthorne and his writing, I distributed copied excerpts of two popular books written by 19th-century women: excerpts from Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* and copies of the first 35 pages of Cummins's book, *The Lamplighter,* to which I added Hawthorne's "scribbling women" quote at the top of the first chapter (the out-of-print book may be downloaded for free from http://www.girlebooks.com). Grounding ourselves once more in our comparative grid of reading tastes, we read and discussed Cummins's and Hall's work, paying particular attention to the many ways in which it differed from Hawthorne and Melville.

Next, I brought Longfellow into the conversation, handing out Basbanes's article (see Sidebar) for students to read. While there was a genre shift from fiction to poetry, students found that the same basic principles applied to Longfellow's work: it was accessible and narrative-driven. Students worked in groups to pictorially represent some of the things they learned about Longfellow (from the Basbanes article), and we worked in literature circles to discuss the lesser-known poems, including his *Poems of Slavery,* which came out in 1842 but were never included in books sold in the South (to ensure a Southern audience). Finally, I juxtaposed excerpts of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* with Longfellow's poetry to catalyze a discussion about the differences in style and theme. Ultimately I hoped to discuss the ways in which Longfellow's poetry marked a shift that would later be capitalized on by the Modernists.

By the end of the unit, my students were not only attuned to the basic debates and layers of the canon, but many walked away with a more three-dimensional vision of themselves as readers and English students. Not "getting" a difficult canonical American literature text was likely more complicated than they had initially thought and, most importantly, not a simple reflection of ability but rather a complicated interplay of reading tastes, my own pedagogical and curricular choices, and the students' access to the literary, historical, and social contexts from which the texts in question emerged.

My own approach to a more historically and culturally grounded approach to 19th-century literature is just one of many ways that we might think about reframing this unit in all levels of our American literature courses. For example, to think about

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Melville and Hawthorne: http://melville.org: This is an excellent website dedicated to the works, historical context, and life of Melville. This site includes Melville's intimate letters to Hawthorne, which I used to not only generate a conversation about the writing relationship between these men but to also spark a conversation about sexuality—in the 19th century as well as today.

Hard-to-find texts by women: http://girlebooks.com: This is a collection of free, downloadable texts by women authors, including Cummins's *The Lamplighter,* Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall,* and many other hard-to-find, out-of-print, and lesser-known texts written by women.

Longfellow:

- http://hwlongfellow.org: The Maine Historical Society's website on Longfellow (he was born and raised in Maine) boasts a comprehensive database of Longfellow's poetry, biographical information, and an exceptional compilation of resources for teaching about Longfellow and his poetry.
- Christoph Irmscher's *Longfellow Redux* (2006): This book, especially the first chapter "Strangers as Friends," which documents Longfellow's relationship to his reading public, is an exceptional resource for any teacher interested in including Longfellow (or including him differently) in an American literature course. It is compulsively readable and meticulously researched.
- Nicholas A. Basbanes's *Smithsonian* article "Famous Once Again" (2007): This is a fascinating and accessible article on Longfellow. My students read this and used the information to visually depict (in groups) what they learned about Longfellow, allowing us to collectively see and understand the scope of Longfellow's influence in the 19th century. You can find this article online at http://smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/famous_once_again.html.

canon formation more broadly, try having students create and defend their own American literature canon. At the end of the Romanticism unit, students should choose the writers they feel best represent "American" literature. Most importantly, they should add the poems, songs, or books that they have read and that they would consider to be ideally "American." This could easily be a summative assessment at the end of a quarter or semester, or even at the end of the year where, instead of focusing on the 19th century, students could choose an American literature canon that spans whatever years they see as logical parameters. The writing component could ask them to be explicit about their choices and should allow space for them to reflect on what the canon, as they see it playing out in school, misses. What they include would index these holes. How is their canon "American"? What values, beliefs, and ideas drove their choices? An extension of the written defense of the canon would be having students write and perform conversations or interactions between the various members of their "canon." For example, if a student's canon included Tupac, Poe, Longfellow, Lauryn Hill, Whitman, Wes Anderson, and Thoreau, the students could have these figures debating the merits of their work as American texts and defending their place in the canon.

Creating Space for Meaty Conversations

What would happen if we approached our American literature curriculum, at least in part, from a different vantage point and took seriously the social, historical, and literary contexts out of which these texts were born? If we can orient ourselves and our students toward what people in the 19th century were actually reading, thinking about the ways that these writers and their approaches interplayed with the writers who are so central in our classes today, then I believe we can open up real space for meaty conversations about reading tastes and canon formation.

Most importantly, by exposing students to literary history and allowing our students to weigh in on those conversations, we are making explicit the complex and subjective nature of canon formation: that the canon is the result of particular choices that reflect particular conceptions of what it means to be American, and how those identities inform and bleed into the texts that people write. When our students understand that what they read in their textbook is not a sacred and irrefutable narrative, but rather a series of choices driven by particular understandings of what is significant, relevant, and good, they can think more expansively about what an "American" story might look like at any particular historical moment, including their own. This kind of critical thinking could easily apply to other contexts. Whose faces are chosen to grace ads, for example? What music gets played where?

Finally, that many of our students often value the same qualities that made writers such as Longfellow and Cummins popular is an asset to be

leveraged, allowing us to better engage students in a more complicated and compelling study of 19th-century American literature. This is *not* to say that we should abandon texts that make us work hard to understand them. On the contrary. Not only would abandoning teaching canonical writers be a travesty from a literary perspective, but it would also be a disservice to our students as they head into college where the familiarity with these works is expected. To avoid teaching popular 19th-century writing just because it is more accessible not only denies students the opportunity to read something—*gasp!*—easier but also denies students a window into the reading tastes of actual 19th-century readers.

Notes

1. Arthur N. Applebee's *Curriculum as Conversation: Transforming Traditions of Teaching and Learning* and Gerald Graff's *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* are two works that individually and collectively support the kind of approach to 19th-century American literature that I am advocating here.

2. For example, it might surprise students to know that in 1919, Fred Patee's *Century Readings for a Course in American Literature* included hundreds of American writers identified as "major." In 1959, at the height of New Criticism, Gordon Ray's *Masters of American Literature* included 18 authors as "major" American authors. See Jane Tompkins's "'But Is It Any Good?': The Institutionalization of Literary Value" in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860.*

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Texts from the 19th century can have relevance to contemporary students' lives, but unfamiliar contexts and problematic representations make engagement with these texts challenging. "Reaching Across Time: Scaffolded Engagements with a 19th-Century Text" incorporates collaborative drama, art, and technology to scaffold students' reading of Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." Students develop their understanding of the setting through online research, accessing images and histories of several different ethnic communities in 1850s New York. They use this background knowledge to identify and address silences and gaps in the story, as well as to reflect on the meanings the story, characters, and themes hold for the 21st century. Guided by these multiple entry points, students read independently and develop an in-depth understanding of a complex 19th-century text, and they summarize their impressions by creating a collage using images found in their research and related quotes (from literary, informational, and student-created texts). http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/reaching-across-time-scaffolded-1179.html

Barbara Moss, Diane Lapp, and Mary O'Shea

Tiered Texts: Supporting Knowledge and Language Learning for English Learners and Struggling Readers

This article, through an engaging analysis of classroom dialogue, describes how and why a tiered-text approach to reading can help all students meet high standards for comprehension and content.

One of the most persistent challenges facing teachers is the need to provide effective literacy instruction for adolescent English language learners (ELLs). The literacy crisis for these students is a compelling one; only 4% of eighth-grade ELLs scored at the proficient or advanced level on the reading portion of the 2005 National Assessment for Educational Progress (Perie, Grigg, and Donahue). A lack of at-grade-level literacy development is exacerbated for ELLs who enter the educational system in the later grades, often with below-grade-level literacy skills in their native language (Short and Fitzsimmons). They must master complex course content while simultaneously gaining English language proficiency in high schools where rigorous, standards-based curricula and high-stakes assessments are the norm (Short and Boyson).

We propose that to address the lack of literacy among ELLs and other struggling readers, instruction must support the development of academic language and background knowledge essential for learning in high school content-area classrooms and the workplace. If English language learners in English classrooms are to succeed in critically engaging with academic texts, they need intentionally designed interventions that facilitate mastery of subject-specific academic vocabulary and background knowledge, as well as the forms and functions of academic language. To support teachers as they make these accommodations, we share in this article an intervention that scaffolds both background knowledge and language development through tiered texts. First we discuss factors involved in acquiring a school or academic discourse. Then we define and describe tiered texts as a way to differentiate literacy learning for English language learners and other struggling readers. Finally we identify ways that teachers can implement tiered texts, using a classroom-based example of how tiered texts can be used with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.*

Acquiring School Discourse: What We Know

While English language learners often acquire social communicative language skills within two or three years, development of academic language skills requisite for success in content-area classrooms takes from five to ten years (Thomas and Collier). English learners are usually given only one or two years of ESL instruction, during which time they achieve communicative competence. Then they are transitioned into regular English classes where they must "sink or swim" because instruction has not been designed to meet their needs.

Many students experience a mismatch between their home language and the academic English they encounter at school (Hart and Risley; Heath, "Sense," *Ways*). Academic English refers to the language of school, a unique language that students typically encounter only in the academic environment. According to Jeffrey Zwiers, it may be the most complicated "tool set" in the world to learn to use.

Academic English is only one register of many formal and informal registers of English that students encounter in and out of school. When texting a friend, for example, students use an informal language register that depends on brevity and

abbreviations. When presenting a speech in class, conversely, students use a highly formal register to convey their thoughts about a topic. They are expected to organize their speech in a certain way and use sophisticated language to convey their ideas. Every register is important; none should be considered superior to another since each speaker needs to use multiple registers to communicate in varied discourse communities.

Many students, however, need explicit instruction in using more formal language registers. Additive communication, an approach we advocate, invites instruction that blends home and school languages (Brock et al.; Turner). Learning academic content, in large part, involves understanding the key concepts and language of each discipline. Providing ELLs with multiple opportunities to read, write, and talk about academic vocabulary coupled with explicit instruction results in depth of word knowledge (August et al.) and improved reading comprehension (Langenberg et al.). Learning vocabulary must not only involve direct instruction in word meanings but also allow students to apply strategies for independent vocabulary learning (Carlo, August, and Snow). All too often, however, vocabulary instruction for secondary English language learners involves skill-and-drill instruction focused on a narrow range of skills (Short and Fitzsimmons).

Academic vocabulary, a critical component of the background knowledge ELLs need to respond critically to a range of texts, involves understanding the words and phrases that are the "talk of a text." Examples include complex and difficult phrases such as *evaluate the premise, contrast the characters, identify the chronology, provide a citation, examine the event,* and *determine the appropriate consequence.* Phrases like these often pose problems for students who lack knowledge of academic vocabulary.

Academic and topical vocabularies are part of the background knowledge needed for success in learning a content area. In addition to these crucial language areas, text comprehension is also based on world knowledge and student ability to access and relate appropriate background world knowledge to the text topic being read (Carroll). While reading, one must note familiarity with the topic, the context in which the topic is appearing, and the language carrying the message. To accommodate this, the effective teacher explicitly scaffolds instruction in ways that develop students' schema, thus laying the foundation for successful critical literacy experiences. After engagement in these scaffolded activities, students are more prepared to gain, analyze, evaluate, and act on new, yet related, information from increasingly difficult sources.

To study the efficacy of this type of scaffolded instruction for English language learners and struggling readers, we designed a series of assignments that develops background knowledge, provides contextualized instruction in academic vocabulary, and encourages critical literacy. This approach requires that teachers help students move beyond literal understanding of a text, engage with a variety of text types, note text structures and features, explore a text's purposes and meanings, and reconstruct texts (Luke and Freebody). According to Ernest Morrell, engaging adolescents in such critical literacy experiences can move them from marginalization to the mainstream.

Tiered Texts: What Are They?

Tiered texts provide students with rich opportunities to deepen their understanding of a range of topics and a variety of aspects of academic language. Students begin with an easy-to-read text aligned with their entry-level background, academic, and topical knowledge. As their bases of knowledge and language expand, they are able to read, discuss, and write about more difficult texts on the same topic, using their newly acquired topical and academic vocabulary. Built on the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Fisher and Frey; Pearson and Gallagher)—which involves explicit teacher modeling, guided instruction, and independent practice—tiered texts scaffold student understanding and provide background knowledge and the multiple exposures to academic vocabulary required for comprehension (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson).

Instructional Implementation: How Can Tiered Texts Be Created or Selected?

To create or select tiered texts, teachers must first identify standards-based topics of study in which ELLs need additional support, and select two or more supportive texts that can help students access the target text. These texts should become

progressively more challenging and contain similar concepts, topical vocabulary, and academic language. The first text should be short, introduce students to key concepts, and be written at a level that matches students' entry-level instructional abilities. The second can be a longer, more challenging text that reinforces the information and language of the first and transitions students to the target text. The target text is a grade-level text the teacher wants students to master independently. It may be from the literature anthology, a classroom novel such as *The Grapes of Wrath* or *The Scarlet Letter,* or a challenging text from any genre. This does not have to be a single final text read by the whole class since in many classrooms students read thematically related texts at varying degrees of difficulty. The important feature is that students' language and concepts are being scaffolded so that they will be able to read and comprehend a related text independently. Figure 1 provides examples of tiered texts that can be used with *To Kill a Mockingbird, The Grapes of Wrath,* and *Great Expectations.*

As she reads aloud, Mary invites students to compare and contrast life now with life during that era and models the uses of Shakespearean words and phrases to introduce the vocabulary.

Once texts are selected, the teacher implements scaffolded instruction through an instructional frame that gradually transfers the instructional lead from teacher to students, with the goal being student independence. Below we show how this is instructionally supported through the use of tiered texts on the same topic but with ascending levels of vocabulary and concept sophistication.

Tier 1: Building Background

To connect the reader and the topic, teachers need to build the knowledge base and topical and academic language students will need to read all the tiered texts. This happens as the teacher completes a read-aloud, poses a problem, shows a video, or shares real-world artifacts.

For example, teacher Mary O'Shea at Kearny High School in San Diego uses tiered texts to help students access Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as they study the theme of "love" as a cause of violence. To support her students, many of whom are English language learners, she develops background knowledge about the play, carefully introducing key academic vocabulary and scaffolding student comprehension in ways that help them develop language and conceptual skills they need to read at grade level and beyond.

During Tier 1 of the lesson, Mary uses three different texts to build student background knowledge for reading *Romeo and Juliet.* First she employs a picture book, *William Shakespeare and the Globe* (Aliki). Second, she shares a brief plot summary of the play with her students through *The Romeo and Juliet Rap* (Jacobs). Finally, she shows the Franco Zeffirelli film version of *Romeo and Juliet,* which uses the original language found in the play.

This description of Tier 1 demonstrates how Mary develops student background knowledge about the life and times of Shakespeare through a shared reading of Aliki's *William Shakespeare and the Globe.* Before moving to this text she places her target text *Romeo and Juliet* on the document camera and explains, "When I want to read a new text like *Romeo and Juliet* that has language that I might not know, I first read a less difficult text that uses more familiar language." Then removing *Romeo and Juliet* from the document camera and in its place showing *William Shakespeare and the Globe,* she continues, "I like to read an introductory text like this before I begin to read *Romeo and Juliet* because it gives me a basic knowledge about the history and society, introduces me to the language, and helps me to compare life today with life back then. I think you'll enjoy reading this with me." As she reads aloud, Mary invites students to compare and contrast life now with life during that era and models the uses of Shakespearean words and phrases to introduce the vocabulary. Pausing after having interactively shared several pages, Mary says, "As I'm reading this book I'm realizing that it is giving me some good information about Shakespeare's life and plays. I'm also learning interesting background information about what life was like when he lived, such as living conditions, laws, entertainment, or customs. I hope this is happening for you too. Take a few minutes to share with a partner some things you're noticing about how your life would have been different back then. Try to use the language. Then we will record these on a class chart."

FIGURE 1. Sample Tiered Texts for Selected Classroom Novels

	To Kill a Mockingbird	*The Grapes of Wrath*	*Great Expectations*
Tiered Text(s) 1	*To Kill a Mockingbird.* Dir. Robert Mulligan. MCA. 2005. DVD. *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow.* Dir. Sam Pollard. PBS, 2004. DVD. Shields, Charles. *I Am Scout: The Biography of Harper Lee.* New York: Holt, 2008. Print.	Cooper, Michael L. *Dust to Eat: Drought and Depression in the 1930's.* New York: Clarion, 2004. Print. Library of Congress. "America from the Great Depression to World War II." Washington DC, n.d. Web. 15 Jan. 2010. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fahome.html>. Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust.* New York: Scholastic, 1997. Print.	Ackroyd, Peter, et al. *Uncovering the Real Dickens.* BBC: Opus Arte, [Heathfield, East Sussex], 2003. Damon, Duane. *Life in Victorian England (the Way People Live).* Detroit: Lucent, 2006. Print.
Tiered Text(s) 2	Sergel, Christopher, and Harper Lee. *The Play of "To Kill a Mockingbird."* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995. Print.	Rice, Earle. *The Grapes of Wrath (Globe Fearon Edition).* New York: Globe Fearon, 1996. Print.	Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations: The Graphic Novel.* Detroit: Lucent, 2010. Print. *Great Expectations.* Videocassette. Criterion Collection, 1998.
Target Text	Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird.* 1960. New York: Warner, 1982. Print.	Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath.* New York: Viking, 1939. Print.	Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations.* 1860. New York: Penguin, 2002. Print.

After listening in as the partners chat, Mary invites them to share their thoughts:

Javier: I guess that I'd be more likely to get sick back then 'cause rats brought diseases.

Maria: Yea, they think the rats caused the plague and lots of people died when that happened.

Mary: Yes, when we read *Romeo and Juliet* you'll hear one character say, "A plague on both your houses." Thousands of people died from the plague and they were terrified because they didn't know what caused it. What do you think "A plague on both your houses" means?

Michael: Maybe like a curse on two houses?

Mary: Yes, the two houses refer to the two warring families in the play, the Montagues and the Capulets. Romeo was a Montague and Juliet was a Capulet. The character is putting a curse on both houses by wishing the plague on both.

Latisha: They did some horrible stuff back then, like they chopped off people's heads who were criminals and people went to watch.

Andy: Yeah, beheadings were common in that time.

Alan: They weren't just mean to people, they were also real cruel to animals. Like in some of the pictures, they had bear baiting and cockfights and things like that.

Devon: I like the picture showing how they went to plays, kind of like how we go to movies, but they threw stuff if they didn't like the play.

As the discussion continued, Mary pointed out to students that they were identifying customs related to living conditions, the law, and entertainment. She categorized each statement on the chart and noted that later as they read *Romeo and Juliet,* they would learn even more about these customs that could be added to this information chart.

Tier 2: Practicing and Preparing to Read a Difficult Text

During Tier 2, students gain practice in reading an easy text that prepares them for reading the more difficult original play. Graphic novels (see, for example, *Picture This! Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet* [Page and Petit]) and raps are ideal for this purpose because they often mimic the language and features of the original text but are more accessible to students.

After completing work with the Tier 1 texts, Mary moves students into the Tier 2 text, *The Romeo and Juliet Rap* (Jacobs). Because rap represents a familiar and engaging form of language for today's students, it bridges students' out-of-school and in-school language. Furthermore, this particular rap mimics the format of the play and provides the setting, introduces key characters, and outlines key events in the original text.

Mary helps students draw on prior knowledge by reviewing the elements of plot they had previously studied during a short-story unit. She notes that they will encounter these in the play, but that the format of a play is different from a story. She shows students how to identify each act and scene, the setting, and the speaker and their lines. She then writes four terms—*prologue, dialogue, monologue,* and *soliloquy*—on the board and explains that the plot in a play occurs through the actor's speeches. She helps students analyze these terms in this way: "Let's begin by looking at the first three words. Each contains the root word *logue,* which means speech. Let's look first at the word *prologue.* Here are some words with the prefix pro: *produce, proceed,* and *promotion.* Let's look at the word *promotion.* What does it mean?"

> **Maria:** To move up a grade.
>
> **Mary:** Yes. When I look at this word I know that the root is motion, which means to move. The prefix *pro* means ahead of or in front of. So putting these together I know that promotion means to move ahead. So what do you think the word *prologue* means?
>
> **Julio:** Speech ahead of or before??? That doesn't make sense.
>
> **Mary:** Terrific, analyzing the parts of the word got you on the right track. The prologue is a speech that happens before the story begins. It gives the setting and some background about the story. Let's look at the prologue in the rap. It comes right at the beginning. As I read it, listen to find out the setting, the characters, and any additional background information. Raise your hands as soon as you know these three things.

Following this brief introduction, Mary and the students used the same sequence of instruction to analyze the terms *dialogue, monologue,* and *soliloquy.*

Next Mary explains to the students, "In the next scene from the rap, we meet two other characters in the play, Tybalt and Mercutio. In this scene, Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, kills Mercutio, Romeo's best friend. To get you thinking about this scene, I'd like you to discuss with your partner what you would do if someone killed your best friend." She asks if they would seek immediate revenge or allow the law to deal with those responsible. Listening to their thinking, Mary notices that many feel troubled by this question.

> **Julio:** I'm not certain if the jury would convict a guy for killing my friends, especially cause my friends are mostly Black and Mexican. I would take care of it myself.
>
> **Michael:** I know you'd feel like this but, I'd hate to end up in prison.

As they discuss this dilemma, Mary offers additional insight by saying, "I know most people would want to seek revenge, they think they wouldn't care, but there are grave consequences in today's society when we take the law into our own hands. If you ended up in jail you would feel you had avenged the loss of your friend and you would have many years there to think about your loss of income and education and how this was not only affecting you but your family and other friends."

> **Michael:** Yeah that's exactly what happened to my cousin three years ago, and his mom is still suffering from it.
>
> **Julio:** I know but I'd sure feel like that.
>
> **Mary:** Of course you would, but you must give our court system a chance.

At this point Mary reads the rap aloud to the students, up to the point after Tybalt and Mercutio fight. Then she asks students to predict what will happen next. Mary cautions them that they will later find out what the terrible consequences of Ro-

meo's actions are and how this event influences the rest of the story.

To further engage students with the rap, Mary wants to familiarize students with more of the important characters. She explains: "Have you ever read a book that had a lot of characters that you couldn't keep track of?" Several students nod their heads. "Sometimes when I'm reading a book with lots of characters I write notes about each character in the front of the book. When we watched the movie, we got to know some of the key characters in the story. Today we will use a literary sociogram to help us keep track of the characters and the relationships among them [see fig. 2]. Whenever you forget who a character is, you can look back at the chart. Let's start with Romeo and Juliet. Romeo was from the Montague family, and Juliet was a Capulet. We can show their relationship on the sociogram by drawing lines with arrows, with one pointing from Romeo to Juliet and vice versa. We will write the word *loved* on the line to show their relationship." Mary continues:

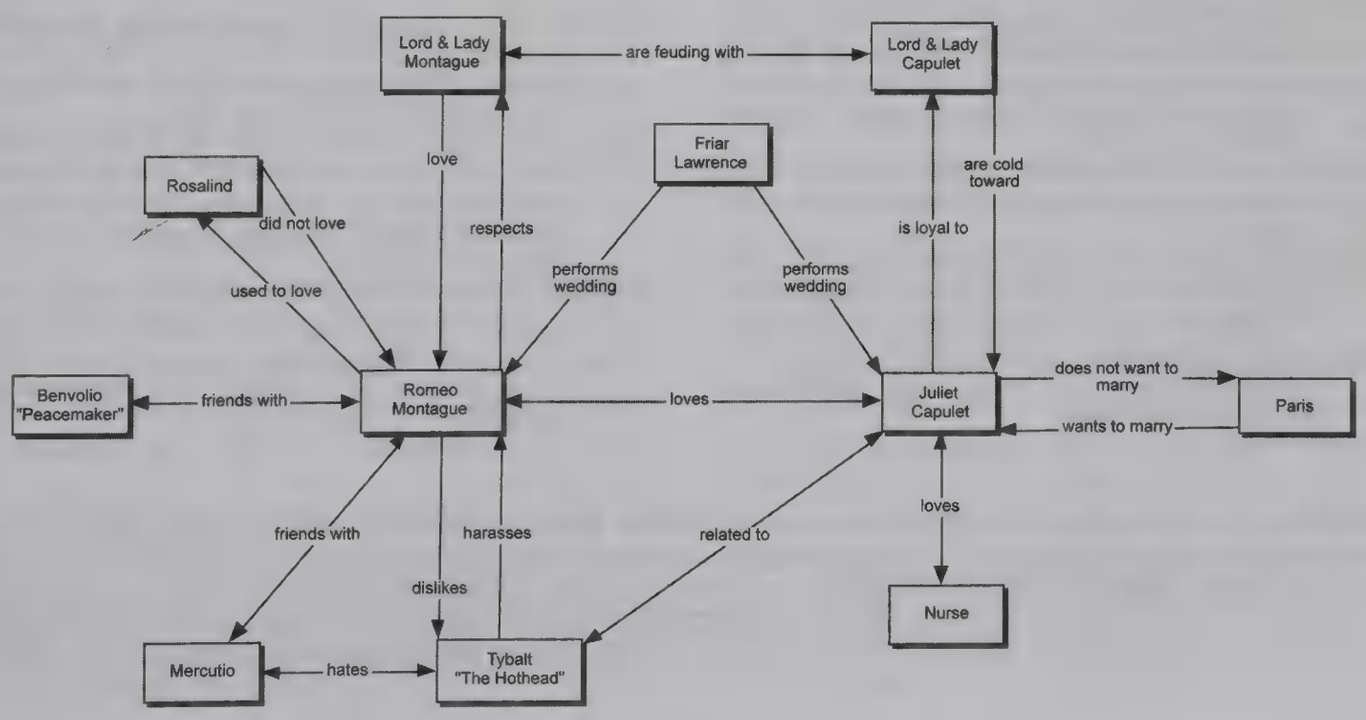
> **Mary:** What other characters have we met so far?
>
> **Latisha:** The two guys that were fighting: Mercutio and Tybalt.
>
> **Kevin:** Yeah, Mercutio was Romeo's best friend, and Tybalt was Juliet's cousin.
>
> **Michael:** They hated each other.
>
> **Mary:** Great. Let's record that on the chart. We will draw arrows to each of these characters, and write the word *hated* on the line. We can add to this chart as we meet more of the characters and explore their relationships.

At this point, Mary provides students with collaborative practice in reading the rap aloud. She assigns specific scenes to teams of students and has them practice reading their scenes. She also asks them to identify examples of dialogue, monologue, and soliloquy, and to discuss the action in their scene. Following this, students read their scenes aloud to the entire class and discuss their earlier predictions about the outcome of the play.

Tier 3: Independently Reading a Text

Once students developed background knowledge, new vocabulary, and an understanding of characters, they were ready to tackle new scenes from the original version of the play and create a response to the text with minimal teacher assistance. They possessed the prior knowledge necessary to understand the play's structure, format, and characters. As students read scenes from the original text, they paused periodically to collect evidence

FIGURE 2. Literary Sociogram of Romeo and Juliet



about the characters by analyzing direct quotations that they would use later when writing about a character. Finally, students demonstrated their critical understanding of the text by creating a PowerPoint presentation that retold the story from the point of view of a particular character or created an iMovie featuring their character set in a present-day conflict. Their creation of these projects illustrated that they comprehended and could extend topical knowledge and language.

The Promise of Tiered Texts

While the tiered text model is largely untested, it holds promise for meeting the academic literacy needs of secondary English language learners. Tiered texts are necessary to assist students as they deepen their knowledge of the plot details, and for many students, they offer more than one chance to capture it. It is an opportune way to differentiate learning and still keep all students engaged.

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William C. Sewell and Shawn Denton

Multimodal Literacies in the Secondary English Classroom

A high school teacher and a college teacher collaborate on assignments that focus students on "anchored media instruction" and engage them in producing multimodal, technology-infused projects, including public service announcements, fictitious holidays, and music hall-of-fame inductions.

In the past few years, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the study of multimodal literacies; scholarship has recognized the diverse ways 21st-century students create, share, and comprehend meaning (Cordes; Heydon; Mills). While this profusion of information certainly has piqued our interest, precisely how to make our classrooms more "multimodal" has proved troublesome—especially considering increased demands to raise test scores to meet Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks. To provide insight into the issue of multimodal literacy instruction, we explore presentation techniques and instructional activities employed in our secondary language arts classes.

What Is Multimodal Literacy?

Multimodal literacy recognizes that for many children, knowledge construction has shifted away from the static, printed text to dynamic texts supported by sounds and pictures. Furthermore, knowledge construction is much more social and, hence, bound upon situational contexts (Heydon 39–41). As Kathy A. Mills notes, "This is an age of multimedia authoring where competency with written words is still vital, but is no longer all that is needed to participate meaningfully in the many spheres of life" (36). This means that teachers should shift from traditional literacy practices to instruction based on multimodalities where such texts may be presented in a variety of ways: "cards, books, movies, web sites, and video games, and others" (Cordes 11).

We have adopted multimodal literacy practices in our classrooms primarily for two reasons. First, multimodality is now deeply ingrained in how our society communicates (Tierney, Bond, and Bresler 359). Thus, it may be possible to draw on students' out-of-school literacies to help them perform better in our classrooms. Second, we recognize that not all of our students are proficient in multimodality (Mills 36); thus, they need training as well as access to technology to become competitive in the workforce on graduation from high school.

Tools We Use in Multimodal Literacy Instruction

Since the purpose of this article is the application of technology rather than creation of presentations, we will merely highlight discussion of the technical aspects of multimedia production. Our tools were all freeware or already installed on our computers. Selection of our software was mainly due to whichever program was listed first on a Google search. We did have an interesting problem in that while we could access YouTube, our school's filter blocked the word *YouTube* as a search term.

To save YouTube clips to our desktop, we use AVC Lab's "Any Video Convertor." This program saves clips in multiple formats including the Windows Media Video file format (WMV), which Windows uses for Movie Maker and PowerPoint. Movie Maker is an excellent program that was already installed on our pre–Windows 7 computers; the program serves as an editor to condense long clips into shorter, more manageable segments. It

also compresses the project into a smaller file that we can share with each other for class presentation.

Anchored Media Instruction

How did multimodal literacies influence our instruction? Our instructional style has definitely raised eyebrows in our building with some of our old-school colleagues who regularly rely on skill-and-drill instruction; they assumed that all we were doing was showing movies. In fact, we were anchoring our instruction through multiple media formats. Anchored instruction places learning "in problems that seem authentic" (Bottege et al. 300). The original purpose of anchoring was to create a context for "inert knowledge" as students utilized knowledge gleaned from a videodisc program, "The Jaspers Series," to solve problems in middle school mathematics courses (Dickinson and Summers 107). "Anchors are not merely lectures; rather, they are narratives, stories that create a realistic context to make learning motivating, meaningful, and useful" (Shyu 58). Numerous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of anchoring instruction from a variety of subjects from mathematics to language arts (Dickinson and Summers 108).

We broadened our use of anchored video instruction to incorporate other media that our students access daily, such as music and pictures. Anchored media instruction raised many a sleepy head of our students who eagerly embrace our new lecturing techniques. One such example was the use of video clips as story starters. When gauging prior knowledge for the short story "The Boar Hunt," we found that students did not know much about wild boars; many students assumed they were just docile pigs out in the wild. Their assumptions changed dramatically when they were presented with several YouTube clips such as "Smashed by Big Boar!" and "Hogzilla." The students discovered just how quick and dangerous a boar can be. A noticeable outcome was that the volume level with some of our boisterous classes perceptibly dropped when we played the clips: students were engrossed by the squeals and the viciousness of the boar. With a visual and auditory anchor, students eagerly turned to the reading assignment. Later they were able to compare and contrast the videos to the short story.

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Anchored media instruction proved especially effective in our efforts to teach state reading standards. Both of us teach tenth-grade English, and these classes take the Kansas Reading Assessment (KRA). A glaring weakness reflected on previous test results was Kansas Reading Standard 1.4.11: The student "Analyzes and evaluates how an author's style (e.g. word choice, sentence structure) and use of literary devices (e.g. foreshadowing, flashback, irony, symbolism, tone, mood, imagery, satire, point of view, allusion, overstatement, paradox) work together to achieve his or her purpose for writing the text." In fact, this was our lowest-performing standard; students scored a 62.1 percent on the spring 2009 KRA.

As a strategy to improve scores, we turned to anchored media instruction of literary concepts. For instance, Shawn demonstrated each element of the plot diagram by teaching clips from *Star Wars: A New Hope.* Will demonstrated the various types of internal and external conflicts though the *Family Guy* episode "Da Boom." The overall presentation length for each anchor was under ten minutes, and we were able to embed them in our short-story units so the presentations could introduce the literary term before reading the story.

We found that these clips help build background and draw on previous knowledge to make connections with new learning. For instance, to teach first-person narration, we used a YouTube clip, "The

Life and Death of a Pumpkin (The Original)." This award-winning parody of Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum" helped our students see and hear first-person narration as the pumpkin relates his gruesome tale. Days after students viewed the film, we asked them what first-person narration is. If they forgot (as they sometimes do), we referenced the pumpkin; this usually elicited a collective "Oh yeah!" in the room. When we showed this clip to our seniors, many remembered the Poe story from the previous year and were able to make connections. Later in the unit we returned to the clip and discussed how tone and setting and the humor of the piece contribute to the author's purpose and articulate his or her message. The clip became an effective anchor for teaching the rhetorical triangle.[1] As they watched the film, we had students note the pumpkin's ethos as exhibited visually and through his speech. Next, they examined his message to articulate his logos, or appeal to reason. Finally, students provided examples on how the pumpkin generates the pathos of the video; later they will be asked to apply their knowledge to their own writing.

We were delightfully surprised when some students told us that the voices from the video clips helped reinforce their learning. As an example, they remembered Joe Swanson from *Family Guy* being attacked by a giant rat when we discussed character versus nature. But what really made the clip most memorable was Joe shouting "Bring it on!" to the rat in his distinctive accent.

Anchored media instruction appears to be paying dividends in our efforts to raise test scores in that students on the spring 2010 KRA rose from the previous low of 62.1 to an 80 percent. While there may be a number of causes for this dramatic increase, we believe that anchoring our instruction has profoundly improved student performance.

Shawn also discovered that anchored media instruction was able to help us effectively introduce a poetry unit because it provided a fresh perspective to students who are normally resistant to poetry. To get his students engaged with the topic, Shawn played a number of YouTube clips introducing limericks. The clips greatly entertained the class and provided background knowledge for students to write their own limericks. Students demonstrated a great deal of excitement and talked with each other in the hallways and during their seminar classes. They seemed much more eager to share their own poetry and comment about the poems Shawn anchored.

Multimodal Activities

In addition to anchoring our instruction, we took traditional student activities and reformatted them so students could present their assignments multimodally. One such example is our podcasting assignment. To provide extended practice of tested literary terms, we developed an activity where students create public service announcements (PSAs) for their classmates. Grouped into pairs, students are assigned a literary term and are tasked to create a short radio commercial aimed at teaching their peers the term. As an anchor, we showed some popular PSAs from the past. One of our favorites is the old drug awareness commercial in which an actor uses an egg and a frying pan to show the audience what a brain looks like when it is on drugs.

Multimodal literacy instruction can also be used to teach research projects. One such example is Shawn's extension of a unit on *The Christmas Carol,* called Happy Festivus. The project aims to have students develop a personal holiday. Students create a PowerPoint presentation that outlines the holiday's philosophy, practices or traditions, and key literature.

We discovered that the creation of the PSAs was fairly easy technologically: one of our building's mobile labs has laptops with built-in microphones. Students created their scripts and planned out any needed sound effects. When they were ready, they recorded their commercial using the microphone and sound recorder (which is already installed on the computer) and then saved their file to one of our USB flash drives. Once everyone completed the task, we played the commercials to all the classes, so different sections could hear what others had recorded.

Multimodal literacy instruction can also be used to teach research projects. One such example is Shawn's extension of a unit on *The Christmas Carol,* called Happy Festivus. The project aims to have students develop a personal holiday. Students create a PowerPoint presentation that outlines the holiday's philosophy, practices or traditions, and key literature.

Students also develop materials that serve as artifacts of the holiday: cards, songs, advertisements, and slogans—all items that promote the holiday's message.

Presentation of the unit begins with a teaser to set the tone of the assignment; in this case it is a clip from "Saturday Night Live" in which Will Ferrell sings a special holiday message to his audience while spinning on a turntable ("Mark Jensen's Family Christmas"). Next, the purpose and basic elements of the assignment are reviewed. Shawn anchors the assignment with a clip from a *Seinfeld* episode, "The Strike," in which George explains to Kramer the origins of his personal holiday, Festivus. Shawn then gives more detail into what each component of the holiday project should entail. Throughout the presentation, additional *Seinfeld* clips provide extra context for students. Shawn created his own project to aid his students: "Happy Golden Eagle Day." His presentation chronicles winning the state football championship his senior year of high school.

We were impressed with students' final products. For instance, one student created a holiday based on an ancestor who achieved great fame as an aviator during World War II. Her project gave a detailed biography about the war hero and was supported by a variety of film clips, pictures of the aviator, and historical details regarding his role in the war. A humorous project celebrated "Ms. Kibbles Kat-tastic Adventure Day!" Ms. Kibbles happens to be the cat that one of the school's teachers is quite taken with. In fact, the teacher posted videos of her pet on YouTube and her Facebook account; these videos were useful to the student as he made his project. An equally humorous project celebrates "Crapper Day: The Life of Thomas Crapper and the Modern Toilet."

In addition to addressing reading standards throughout our projects, we addressed several writing standards. Students created personal and persuasive types of texts in which they invented their own holiday, defined it, and justified it to their audience. Students also engaged in technical writing as they made decisions about the format of the slides, videos, or speech so the visual and audio aspects were as effectively presented as possible. Students were required to document their sources and create a list of works cited at the end of their presentations. Finally, students had to write songs and make greeting cards for their holidays.

Another representative research activity is Will's Music Hall of Fame project. Students demonstrate that a musician or musical group of their choice should be inducted into a fictional music hall of fame. Students create a PowerPoint presentation or Movie Maker video in which they examine the subject's personal and professional background, explore the subject's discography, and explain the importance of the band in terms of its contribution to the music world. As music plays such an important role in students' lives, students demonstrate a high degree of motivation with this project since they pick their own favorite music groups for their research projects. Student who normally would not be engaged in traditional lessons put a great deal of energy and time into their presentations.

The project is interactive because the students are asked to be hall-of-fame voters. They are given ballots that have specific criteria that recommend or reject the group for induction into the hall. This generates a good deal of discussion among students about which group is worthy or not; it also exercises their critical-thinking skills as they come up with solid justification for their positions. Since the ballot is aligned to the project's grading rubric, students have more familiarity with the assignment's requirements.

Students present information that many of their peers are not familiar with. One engaging project, for instance, was on the group Los Lobos. One of our Latina students was able to impart some of her cultural traditions to the class through the presentation of her favorite band. Another student added a humorous bit of animation to his project on Michael Jackson. He created a stick-figure character "moon walking" as a transitional element from one section to the next. In doing so, he taught us a new way to incorporate pictures into our PowerPoint presentations while also directing his audience's attention.

In terms of standards addressed on the music hall of fame project, our students engaged in study of a variety of informational texts (in particular, biographies) and presented the material (visuals and sounds) in a persuasive format. Students also learned audience awareness as they made decisions about the appropriateness of music lyrics and videos.

Conclusion

Implementation of technology in the classroom initially proved problematic as we had to learn the software, teach several different programs to our students, and adjust our teaching styles to be more multimodal in orientation. However, once we were able to gain more proficiency, we found that students were more receptive to lessons and—as test scores indicated—learned more as a result. Over time, creating materials came much easier as we started making connections of our outside literacies (movies, television shows, and music) to our instruction. In the end, we found assignments to be much more than work; presenting and receiving information in a multimodal format became fun for our students and us.

Editor's Note

1. For a one-page explanation of the rhetorical triangle, see "Rhetorical Situation: A Poster" in the July 2010 *English Journal.*

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "It's My Life: Multimodal Autobiography Project," students write autobiographies, illustrate them, and set them to music. Music is a powerful tool to evoke emotion, and students carefully select songs to accompany the stories from their lives. Students brainstorm lists of important events along with images and music that represent those events. They then create storyboards in preparation for a final PowerPoint project. After making revisions, students present their final projects to their peers in class. If PowerPoint is unavailable, students might create posters and play soundtracks using cassette or CD players or record a podcast. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/life-multimodal-autobiography-project-1051.html

Robyn Campbell

The Power of the Listening Ear

Teachers agree that listening is important, but do we spend enough time building students' listening skills? A teacher suggests many classroom-tested strategies.

George Bernard Shaw said, "The problem with communication, is the illusion that it has been accomplished" (qtd. in Healey 201). Communicating effectively is a skill that must be taught and practiced and the act of listening is a large part of this skill.

According to the *International Journal of Listening,* listening skills are imperative to reading comprehension and are valuable enough for "38 out of the 51 government entities to include listening skills as part of their English language arts standards" (Beall, Rosier-Gill, Tate, and Matten 129). This same article makes it clear that, although the skills are seen as valuable, they are not given sufficient time in the classroom. I created a survey about the importance of listening skills in the classroom that I presented to the faculty of a rural high school. I found that 80% of the teachers believed that listening skills are equally important across the curriculum but 75% said they devote less than 10% of instructional time to listening skills. Although students spend half their school day listening and at least 80% of what one knows is acquired through listening, *Education Digest* reports that students are only operating at a 25% listening efficiency (Anderson and Brent 67). The teachers I surveyed said that fewer than half of their students are effective listeners.

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I believe I have identified a real problem between what is expected and what is being taught. Teachers typically use an auditory method of teaching because they assume that students know how to listen. The state of Illinois, for example, does not assume that their students know how to listen. The state has dedicated its fourth goal in the Language Arts learning standards to listening and speaking effectively, because these skills are essential to sending, receiving, and understanding messages. Illinois has even included a requirement that the student be able to follow complex oral instructions. These standards hold the teachers and the students in Illinois accountable for the improvement of listening skills across all 13 years of school (http://www.isbe.net/ils/ela/standards.htm). This accountability goes beyond content and grade levels and requires all teachers to work toward a common goal, which is the increase of listening and speaking skills in their students.

Discovering "Hearing Aids"

The following suggestions are research-tested and practical, without being time-consuming. They focus on "active listening skills," in other words, listening that requires a great deal of concentration and focus. The three basic principles prevalent in my findings are teacher-modeled listening, defining a purpose, and preparing for listening.

Keith McPherson in *Teacher Librarian* suggests that modeling active listening skills is a big step toward teaching those skills in the classroom. Making eye contact with children while they are speaking to you, clarifying the message by repeating or rephrasing, and asking questions and not interrupting are important aspects of this model (McPherson 74). One of the best teaching tools for any skill is modeling. "[W]hen children have a good listening model to refer to—when they not only feel they are being heard but listened to as well—they are more likely to listen to others" (75).

The first step for teaching listening in the classroom is for teachers to evaluate their own listening skills. The organization RFB&D, or Recording For the Blind & Dyslexic, has created a listening inventory tool that would be helpful for teachers to use to check their own listening skills as well as those of their students (see www.learningthroughlistening.org). This inventory is aligned with the *New York Learning Standards for English and Language Arts* but can be adapted for other states. The results of our listening inventory can help teachers become aware of their listening processes and the model of listening we are displaying for our students.

B. Nancy Hysop and Bruce Tone suggest that a teacher working to improve students' listening literacy should focus on establishing a purpose for listening while reading aloud or requiring students to listen effectively.

The Learning Assistance Center from City College of San Francisco (see http://www.ccsf.edu/NEW/en/student-services/learning-resources/learning-assistance-center/college-success.html) provides strategies and surveys for listening skills, including a chart that lists poor listening skills or common pitfalls to listening for the average student. The poor listener focuses on the speaker's voice, clothes, or looks and, in so doing, discounts whatever they might say due to a critical stance on the speaker. The good listener looks for the ideas present and doesn't focus on the speaker.

The website Learning Through Listening (http://www.learningthroughlistening.org) provides a plethora of resources for teachers regarding listening literacy. One of the suggestions for preparing students to listen is a KWL chart. The students start by writing what they already *know* about the topic at hand, then they write a few questions regarding what they *wonder* about, and then, after the presentation or the reading, the students will write what they *learned* about the topic. This resource operates as a wonderful cross-curricular assessment tool to measure the effectiveness of listening. Students will be much more apt to listen effectively if they know why they are listening and what they are listening for. There are tools available to teachers to help students develop this skill. For example, the Learning Assistance Center provides a helpful mnemonic device that can encourage students in their purpose for listening (see http://www.ccsf.edu/Services/LAC/Lern10_Online_Tutor_Training/tripA.html). Triple-A-Listening requires attitude, attention, and adjustment. Attitude reminds students that half the battle in learning is attitude; if students maintain a positive attitude about a lecture or a teacher, they will be far more open-minded and prepared for the mental reception of orally presented material. Attention is to encourage students to be active in their attempts to concentrate. Focusing on the lecture or reading will ensure that student will process the ideas, rather than dump them quickly out of short-term memory. Adjustment encourages students to ask questions if they don't understand or to be prepared to follow a speaker when he or she goes off on a tangent. Students must be able to adjust while listening to obtain the desired information no matter what the presentation style or distractions might be. These skills will work for reading comprehension as well as helping students to retain the knowledge given to them in a lecture. Once students are aware of their purposes for listening, they can employ the Triple-A-Listening technique as a skill to focus on the purpose and positively affect their ability to retain what they hear.

The first step for teaching listening in the classroom is for teachers to evaluate their own listening skills.

Finally, teachers can employ procedures and methods in the classroom that will help students *prepare* to listen. One procedure I have used in the classroom came from Harry K. Wong and Rosemary T. Wong's *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher.* For quieting down the classroom and getting the students' attention, Wong suggests simply raising a hand and not saying a word (182). I began to use this procedure with my classes and

found that when I employed it before giving directions I had to repeat myself much less often and the students were more successful in the completion of their assignment. I tested the procedure through the use of videotapes where I looked for the number of times directions had to be repeated with and without the use of the procedure. The procedure cut down on 75% of repetitive questions concerning directions. This evidence tells me that students are always going to ask questions about content or directions, but using a procedure and teaching the students how to listen to directions effectively dramatically reduces the instructional time devoted to answering repetitive questions.

Teachers can teach active listening, but they should also encourage the constant use of active listening in the classroom.

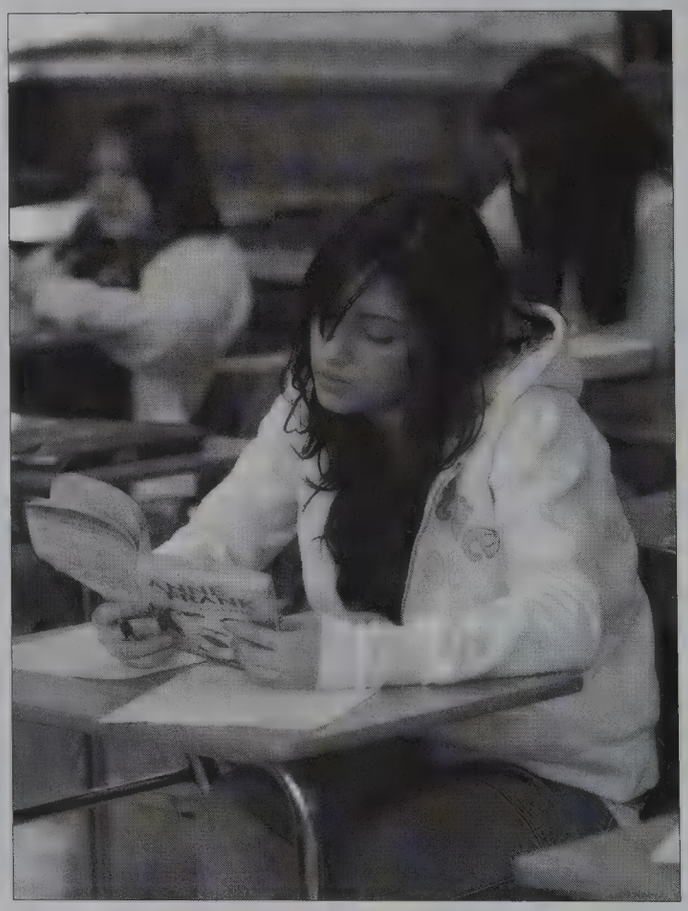
Helping students develop the ability to listen effectively to directions will be useful for them in the future, as they will be required to listen to instructions from professors, managers, or just within the normal interactions of life.

More Suggestions for Teaching Listening

Teachers can teach active listening, but they should also encourage the constant use of active listening in the classroom. Mellisa L. Beall, Jennifer Rosier-Gill, Jeanine Tate, and Amy Matten promote listening education at all levels and give wonderful suggestions to teachers on how to implement the skills into the classroom. One suggestion that all teachers could implement with little time and preparation is "planned discussion," which requires teachers to take a two- to five-minute break from a lecture or reading to have students discuss the most important aspects of the lecture or reading. Such breaks from presentation of material can help increase students' comprehension, as the authors describe: "This task involves students in constructing meaning, and guiding them to express their thoughts, to evaluate their own thinking and the thinking of others, and to reflect on ideas different from their own . . . therefore, it can also be assumed that evaluation of the thoughts of others cannot take place without careful listening" (129). This same skill set can be developed through a "pair and share" of notes.

Another way to implement and test listening skills in the classroom is a Describe and Do activity (one of many resources found at the Learning Through Listening website). For this activity, the teacher describes a process, such as a "how-to," or the students watch an actual how-to video that demonstrates a task. The students are then asked to write out a task card testing their ability to listen to the directions and then effectively communicate those directions to the rest of their group. Suggested tasks include how to tie a tie, how to do a magic trick, and how to play Rock Paper Scissors.

Another useful tool to develop students' listening skills is audiobooks. They are beneficial for differentiating instruction for a multilevel class, but beyond that they can be used to increase students' understanding and appreciation of the written word. Gene Wolfson shares that "[a]udio books can model reading, teach critical listening and encourage oral language usage while increasing comprehension" (106). Denise Johnson states that audiobooks can be used to sidestep unfamiliar dialects or accents, increase vocabulary, and most importantly teach critical listening.



Thompson-McClellan Photography

Using audiobooks is not without its disadvantages, but with proper preparation and training they can be a wonderful tool for all students. I shared an audiobook of *Macbeth* with my twelfth-grade students without any preparation or prior discussion and then gave them a listening comprehension quiz. Almost half of the class only answered one out of three questions correctly. More determined than ever to implement the active listening strategies previously discussed, I instructed my students to read the printed text while listening by following along on the page with their finger or a pencil. I then had them take notes on character and theme for a follow-up discussion, and finally I prepared the students for what they were going to hear by reviewing the previous section and helping them make predictions. The students listened to the second section of *Macbeth* and I gave them three questions following the recording. The results were clear: 40% of the class answered all three questions correctly versus only 20% in the pretest. I tried the same method with tenth graders and got similar results; I noted an increase of 50% of the students scoring above 75% on the test after the instruction. This marked increase provides powerful evidence that the teacher has the power to improve students' ability to listen effectively.

The benefit of audiobooks for improving reading skills is similar to that of reading aloud. In their *Teaching for Comprehension in Reading: Grades K–2,* Gay Su Pinnell and Patricia L. Scharer say "[t]he key strategies that are supported within interactive read-aloud are connecting, inferring, summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing and critiquing. These strategies support and extend comprehension" (219). These strategies, which we want students to master, can be demonstrated and exercised through listening to reading either on tape or reading aloud.

Can We Compete with the iPod?

Can we compete with all the noise present in the world today to teach students to listen effectively? I believe we should employ the philosophy "if you can't beat them, join them" by introducing podcasting into the curriculum. The Russell Educational Consultancy and Productions website offers ways that teachers can "exploit" the educational potential of podcasting ("Exploiting"). The site lists three areas where the potential of podcasting can be realized: cross-curricular activities, alternative teaching approaches, and promoting personalized learning. One of the activities suggested is a tourism guide via podcast, which requires students to research a specific geographical area, write a script, and then record the podcast for listening via iPod or MP3 player. A tourist or interested local could use the podcast along with a map to get the most out of an unfamiliar travel destination ("Exploiting"). Podcasting may be a stretch for some classrooms, but with the right equipment it can serve to complement other teaching methods and enrich the quality of learning.

Can we compete with all the noise present in the world today to teach students to listen effectively?

The Importance of Listening

The positive effects of developing good listening skills goes beyond the simple ability to follow directions. The University of Colorado's Conflict Information Consortium (http://conflict.colorado.edu) links active listening skills to conflict resolution. The consortium defines active listening as a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. The researchers at the University of Colorado have found that active listening helps people avoid misunderstandings, and it tends to improve the depth of communication, as people say more when they feel they are really being heard ("Active"). The conflicts that occur in everyday life might be minimized if we learned how to listen to each other more effectively.

Winston Churchill once said, "Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen" (qtd. in Warrell 111). Listening well does take courage, but it also takes skill and practice. English teachers can help. EJ

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The Think-Pair-Share strategy, found on ReadWriteThink.org, is designed to differentiate instruction by providing students with time and structure for thinking on a given topic, enabling them to formulate individual ideas and share them with a peer. This strategy promotes class participation by encouraging a high degree of pupil response. Additionally, this strategy provides an opportunity for all students to share their thinking with at least one other student, which, in turn, increases their sense of involvement in classroom learning. Think-Pair-Share can also be used as an information assessment tool. http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-think-pair-share-30626.html

Search for a New Editor of *English Journal*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *English Journal.* In July 2013, the term of the present editor, Ken Lindblom, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for her or his first issue in September 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *English Journal* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

Spencer Dunford

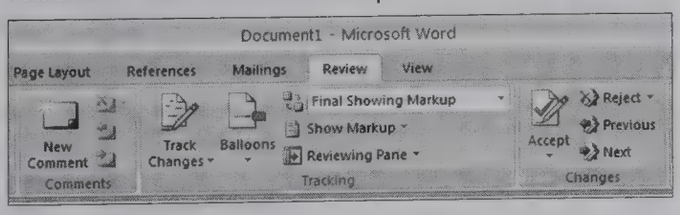
Reviewing Student Papers Electronically

A primer on the Review group of features in Microsoft Word 2007, this article gives directions for making comments and revisions on students' electronic texts.

Picture a stack of student papers about Homer's *Odyssey* sitting on your desk. You choose one, read through it, and make suggestions with a pen. By the 20th paper your comments and corrections seem redundant. By the 40th, your critiques become fewer, less legible, and less clear, and your hand begins to ache. When the 80th paper comes around, your nerves are pinched and your vision blurred. You may even assign As to papers that, when you had started, had received Bs.

These are common problems when reviewing student work in the traditional method. So how can you consistently give quality feedback to your students? Part of the solution may include using the revision and automation tools in Microsoft Word 2007. These features, Comments, Tracking, and Changes, are part of the Review group (see fig. 1). Additionally, the AutoCorrect feature can be used to enhance and support your editing endeavors. Although other word processors, such as Word 2003 and Oracle's OpenOffice.Org, have similar features, I will focus on Word 2007.

FIGURE 1. The Review Group in MS Word 2007



Rationale for Using Word 2007

Technical Editor Carolyn D. Rude states that using "electronic editing [may help] speed up the editing process and semi-automat[e] tedious tasks" (87). Responding to a large number of papers for the same assignment usually results in a teacher writing many of the same comments in the margins. Although repetition may help one learn, it does little to relieve grader's fatigue. Here is a different approach.

Instead of writing cryptic scribbles for which students rarely seek a translation, or abandoning feedback altogether, the markup and automation tools offered in Word 2007 permit you to review papers in less time and with less confusion for students. Once you know how to use these tools, you can share this knowledge with your students.

To use these reviewing tools, your students must be able to give you an electronic copy of their work, whether as a Word attachment (.doc) or in the body of an actual email, which you can copy and paste into a Word file. Once you have finished responding to the paper, then you can send it to students electronically or print it up to hand back in class. To gain full advantage of Word's tools, however, students should receive your comments in the manuscript as .doc attachments.

Feature Overview

The Comments feature allows you to add suggestions to students' papers. AutoCorrect lets you automate your suggestions. Tracking lets you trace these suggestions and other revisions. And Changes allows you to accept or reject any and all revisions. The degree to which you use these tools depends on your objective. For example, in first or second drafts, you may want to focus only on the paper's subject, indicating areas where ideas are weak or a

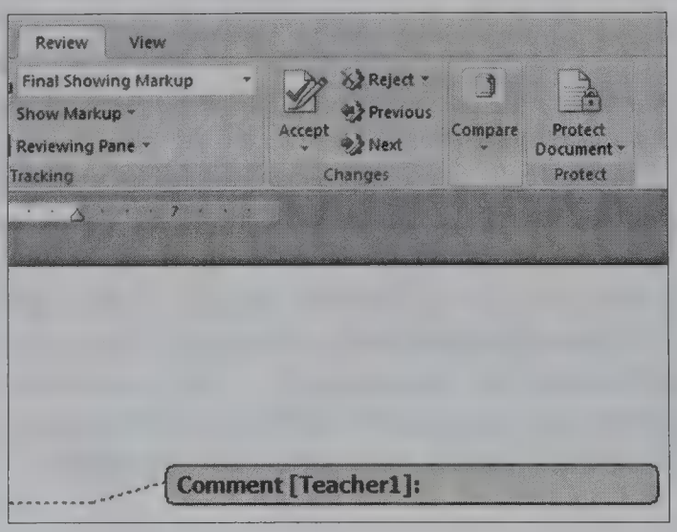
conclusion strong. With a final draft, on the other hand, you can post comments and also make revisions directly to the paper, or inline. These inline revisions are tracked with certain colors or visual signals that may be set to your preference.

Comments

When your written feedback resembles Egyptian chicken scratches, it will be held in contempt and ignored by students. That's where Word's Comments function can help. This feature lets you provide quick, detailed, and legible feedback that can be associated with words, sentences, and even paragraphs. It lets you track your suggestions, provide information, and see all revisions for the purpose of comparison. It may even improve the classroom climate when students see you are cool enough to use technology. In short, almost any suggestion you would normally write by hand can be efficiently done in Word 2007.

To insert a comment, click the Review tab in the Ribbon. Select the word, sentence, or paragraph you wish to comment on. Next, you can add a comment either by clicking on the New Comment icon in the Ribbon or by using the keyboard shortcut signified by parentheses ([Ctrl][Alt][M]). A balloon will appear in which you may insert text; just start typing, and the comment automatically appears (see fig. 2). When you are finished, exit the comment by clicking outside the balloon ([Esc]). To add further comments to the paper, follow the same procedure. The next section explains how to automate your comments.

FIGURE 2. A Comment Balloon



AutoCorrect

AutoCorrect mainly serves to fix common spelling errors. More importantly for our purposes, it allows you to customize its database of corrections. As opposed to enduring the strain of manually writing long, repetitive phrases, you can use abbreviations or unique acronyms in their place. For instance, you can set AutoCorrect to replace "shk" with "Shakespeare" and "dnglm" with "dangling modifier."

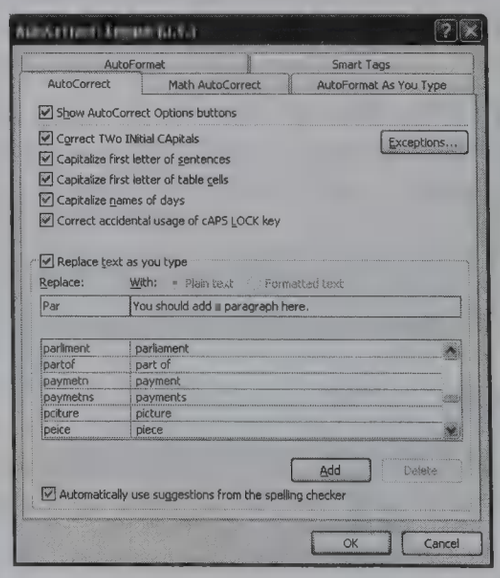
AutoCorrect can also supply longer, more descriptive comments when, for example, an idea needs more details, when details do not support the paragraph's main idea, or when a long, rambling sentence needs to be condensed. "Ple" could substitute for "Please give more details about the topic." You can also use this feature to praise: "ga" substitutes for "Great analysis" or "vpc" for "Very perceptive." You get the idea.

Technical editor Geoff J. S. Hart cautions, "Be careful to choose shortcut text that you'll rarely if ever type," i.e., ensure they are combinations not normally recognized as words (339). You would not want "Very perceptive" to replace "VP" when you mean "Vice President."

To modify this feature, click Word Options, Proofing, and then AutoCorrect ([Alt][A]). Check the box next to the group titled "Replace text as you type" (see fig. 3). Type your custom abbreviation or acronym in the "Replace" text-box. Then type your suggestion in the "With" text-box, and click Add, and then OK.

Hart's "experimentation" with this feature "suggests [the limit is] around 255 characters"

FIGURE 3. AutoCorrect



(337); longer comments, however, might be difficult to generalize to a number of students. While working in a document, you can modify or even delete your entries.

So far this section has focused on AutoCorrect. The Track Changes group, which consists of Comments, Tracking, and Changes, lets you control how Word 2007 shows the revisions you make to a student's paper.

Tracking

You have learned how to make suggestions by inserting comments within balloons. Comments and revisions, however, may also be reflected inline, or within the document. In this section you will learn how to show comments inline as well as how to make them easily seen and understood by students.

Making Changes Visible

If you want to edit a document and see all the revisions, just activate Track Changes by clicking the Track Changes icon in the Review tab ([Ctrl][Shift][E]). Once the feature is chosen, its icon displays an orange background instead of blue (see fig. 4). Now any text you add will appear red and underlined, and the student's writing will remain black. If you delete text it will appear red with strike-through. A black vertical line, serving as a visual cue, will also appear on the left margin beside lines where revisions have been made (see fig. 5). You can also modify the settings to make this feature more personal.

FIGURE 4. Track Changes

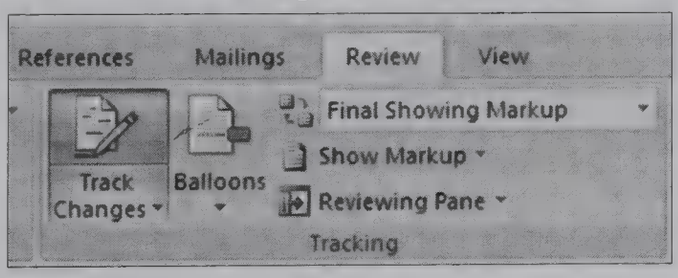
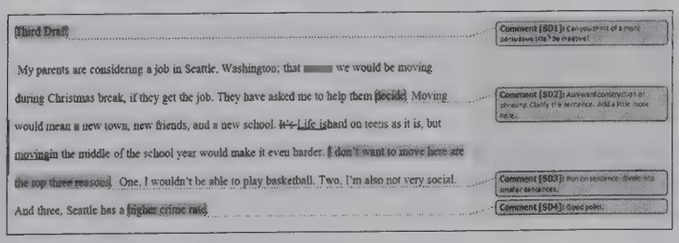


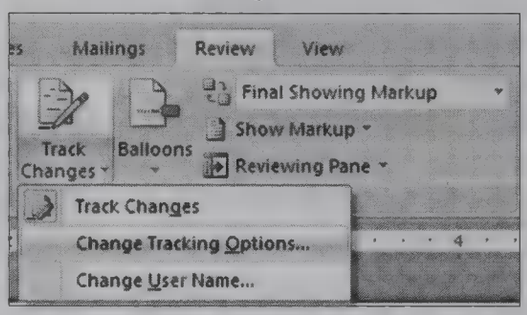
FIGURE 5. A manuscript with Changes Tracked and Comments Added



Modifying Track Changes

To modify how revisions are tracked, click the drop-down arrow right next to Track Changes, and then select Change Tracking Options (see fig. 6). A screen will appear that shows options separated into five categories: Markup, Moves, Table cell highlighting, Formatting, and Balloons. Feel free to customize these features to your own preferences; for example, you may choose to have your changes appear in a color other than red.

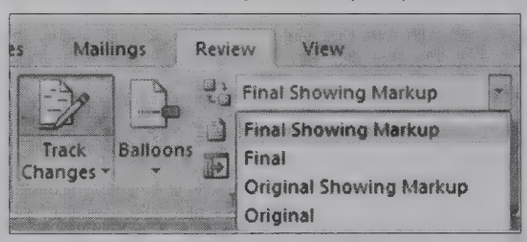
FIGURE 6. Tracked Changes Modifications



Viewing the Comments

If you click the drop-down arrow beside the box titled Final Showing Markup, four options are displayed (see fig. 7). By default, the mode Final Showing Markup shows all of the comments and revisions whether reflected in balloons or inline.

FIGURE 7. Final Showing Markup Options

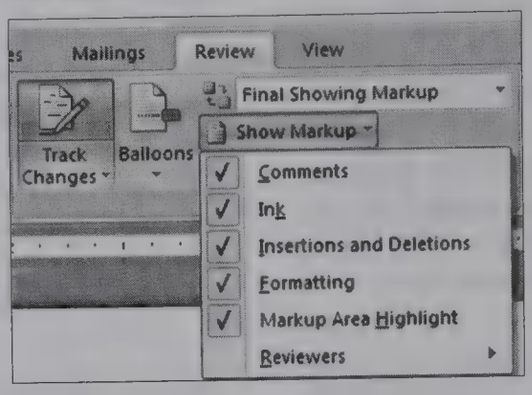


In Final, you see how the document looks with all revisions incorporated into the document. Viewing in Final does not delete the comments; it only makes them invisible. Original Showing Markup shows all comments and revisions to the document as it looks before any revisions were made. Original, as you can guess, shows the document in its original, unedited state. To choose any of these modes, just click the drop-down menu and make the selection. When you review students' papers, it may be easier to leave the function in default. For students, however, viewing in Final mode allows them to see the paper as a clean sheet of text,

without all the noisy markings. Final also exposes any inadvertent errors, which can now be corrected. I move on now to Show Markup.

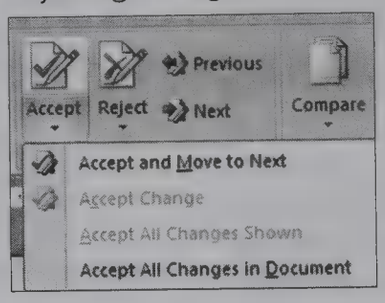
If you view the document in its default mode of Final Showing Markup, then the Show Markup menu lets you control which revisions to reveal (see fig. 8). Clicking the drop-down menu gives the further choices and a check mark for the chosen options. If students are collaborating on a document and making comments and revisions, then the Reviewers drop-down menu allows you to see revisions made by selected students—one at a time or all of them simultaneously.

FIGURE 8. Final Showing Markups Revealed



You now know how to modify the way a document shows your suggestions. Changes, the final section, will show how students can accept or reject your revisions.

FIGURE 9. Accepting or Rejecting Changes



Changes

Instead of having to retype your suggestions into their paper, students can use this feature to automatically incorporate the revisions. Just as AutoCorrect benefits you, Changes may help the students save time.

You may accept or reject revisions by right clicking on the change itself; a screen will then give you the options of accepting or rejecting the change. Or, you can click the drop-down menu under the Accept icon (see fig. 9). Your choices now include Accept and Move to Next, Accept change, Accept All Changes Shown, and Accept All Changes in Document. You can move from one revision to the next, or you can accept them all in one fell swoop. These same choices and procedures also apply to rejecting changes.

Remember, to make comments or revisions disappear, you must remove them by accepting, rejecting, or deleting them. Viewing the document in Final mode does not remove any revisions or comments; it only prevents them from being visible.

Succeeding with Technology

Now that you know how to use some of the features of Word 2007, you can develop them further in ways that match your pedagogical philosophy and your students' needs. As your students learn and use these tools for composition and peer reviews, they also develop their skills as writers and editors. Furthermore, they are better able to succeed in a world where the presence of technology is ever increasing.

Note

The author would like to acknowledge Geoff Hart for providing the inspiration for this article.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

"Draft Letters: Improving Student Writing through Critical Thinking" presents a simple strategy that asks students to think critically about their writing on a specific assignment before submitting their work to a reader. Students write reflective letters to the teacher, identifying their own thoughts on the piece that the teacher is about to read. This lesson explains the strategy and provides models for the project, which can be adapted for any grade level and any writing project. It may be completed only for major assignments or on a more regular basis with all composition that students do. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/draft-letters-improving-student-902.html

Tom Romano

A Relationship with Literature

A well-known teacher and writer narrates his lifelong relationship with a major American poet.

"Keep the cab waiting," our friend warned us.

We didn't listen. My daughter, Mariana, teaches English at Evanston Township High School in Illinois. She's seen mean streets of Chicago and was sure our friend was overreacting. On Saturday afternoon, Mariana and I left the NCTE Annual Convention in Philadelphia and took a cab across the Delaware River to Camden, New Jersey.

The little we saw of Camden was awful, even by Mariana's Chicago standards. Empty businesses, abandoned houses, no hope that we saw. The cabbie dropped us inside the one entrance to Harleigh Cemetery. We entered the small house—the Harleigh Cemetery Association. Several people worked at desks. A helpful woman greeted us. We told her why we'd come. She spread out a map of this working cemetery, showed us our destination, and noted other spots we might visit. We listened politely, eager to be on our way.

Our destination was a two-minute walk along a road that wound through 150 acres. Leaves covered the grass, the open road was ahead. A splendid sun had broken through clouds. I caught sight of the mausoleum I'd seen in a picture years earlier, when Mariana was in middle school and I'd read the Kaplan biography.

I hailed a man lugging a camera and tripod. He worked at the hospital across the street, he told us, and often used his lunch hour to take photos, though this was the first time he'd visited Harleigh. Our good fortune. He took two photos of us with my camera and then went on his way. I wondered what his job was at the hospital. In another time he might have nursed amputees from a terrible, fratricidal war. He might have read to them, given them tobacco, written letters for them (Morris).

"Here's to Walt," I said to Mariana.

"To celebrate and sing his life," she said.

We raised sip-sized plastic bottles of bourbon.

"To Walt," I said again, "whose poetry has meant so much to me."

We brought the bottles together. There was no clink, but it didn't matter. Jazzman Rahsaan Roland Kirk would have called this a "bright moment," standing with my daughter in November sunshine in a place I'd wanted to visit a quarter

Father and Daughter at Whitman's Tomb.

century. Behind us, built into a hillock, a part of the cemeteryscape 117 years, was the mausoleum of Walt Whitman.

* * *

It was built to last. Massachusetts granite. Fifteen feet high to a peaked roof (Reynolds 572). Walls radiated from each side of the tomb, holding back the hill. Two tall trees framed the tomb's doorway, leaning away from each other, their roots spreading above ground in all directions before sinking into the earth. They reminded me of the tendrils sprouting from letters of the title on the cover of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass.*

To the left of the tomb, bushes showed green against the granite and fallen leaves. The doorway was six feet high and four feet wide. A heavy, black metal gate, chained and secured with two locks, kept visitors out. Some had left coins on a flat bar of the gate. Inside, swung open to a permanent position was the original granite door. We stood on the spot where Whitman himself must have stood when he surveyed the site in 1889 and deemed it a perfect setting for the mausoleum he would help design (Reynolds 572).

I looked through the gate, saw the names of other Whitmans interred there: parents Walter and Louisa, siblings Hannah, George, Louisa, and Ed (Reynolds 572). I called to Mariana to come look, my voice hollow and solitary inside the chamber.

* * *

Miami University, 1969

At 19 I was lost. I was a sophomore in college, 250 miles from my hometown of 1,352 people in northeastern Ohio. My high school graduating class numbered 31. Miami's 11,000 students and the academic atmosphere intimidated me, the pressure both social and intellectual. After the first round of tests, a clear academic goal emerged: achieve a C average to avoid academic probation. I did, by two-tenths of a point.

I missed my hometown, even though I knew my life there was done. Three years earlier my father had been killed when two drag racers smashed head-on into his car. A girl I'd fallen in love with a year later broke up with me my senior year. I grieved my father's death. I grieved the loss of the girl, though it was years before I understood that the shock I felt at her abrupt absence from my life was, indeed, a grief. Within three years I'd been twice bereft.

I sought shelter. Miami provided it. Evenings I spent at King Library. My tedious reading speed caused me to spend hours with books. I learned to memorize notes from professors' lectures. I wrote pretentious papers as I tried to sound educated. On weekends I drank too much beer. I told no one about my father and the girl, didn't show their pictures, didn't write about them, didn't mention their names. I didn't want to talk about them. I'd been wounded enough.

I had changed my major from political science to journalism to education. I liked to write. I resonated to the worlds and wisdom I found in literature. I could imagine myself a high school English teacher, where I thought I could bring reading and writing alive for teenagers, as they had come alive for me. But I was lost. I didn't believe much of anything. Not in love. Not in friendship. Not in God. I believed in loneliness. I knew how you could feel lonely in a roomful of people. I believed in death, was certain of its permanence. I was learning to believe in writing and reading.

But I didn't have emotional peace. I was cynical and despairing. Stoicism seemed the best option for living. I embraced nihilism (a new word I'd learned). I didn't have a way to think about living and dying and loving that sustained me—until my sophomore year. One Friday night on the third floor of King Library, my shoes slipped off, my feet propped up on the desk of the study carrel, I read Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself."

Whitman had died nearly 60 years before I was born. But he saved me as surely as if he'd taken my hand at the edge of a precipice. "Song of Myself" made me take stock of where I'd been, the tragedies, losses, triumphs, the spiritual skepticism, the tenderness and callousness I alternated between. Through the poem I saw a way to think about life, a way to assuage my doubt, grief, and loneliness. What Whitman said he "guess'd at" (54)—his vision of equality, continuity, and empathy—started me believing that life had purpose, order, beauty, and that even though people I loved died or left, I could still move forward. In Whitman's startling perceptions, galloping lines, and irrepressible confidence I found hope.

"The smallest sprout," wrote Whitman, "shows there is really no death" (32). My father was dead, though, that was sure. The girl was gone, married, in fact, by then. I'd rejected organized religion. But Whitman heartened me. He wrote about God and he wrote about the integrity of the body—"I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you" (30). In church, in school, in the conventional wisdom of adults in my life, I'd learned that body and mind were separate, that developing the mind was superior to indulging the body. I'd learned that the body and most of its functions were, if not shameful, then better not talked about. Whitman, however, celebrated the body and everything about it. He widened my eyes with writing I'd never read the like of before:

> I do not press my fingers across my mouth,
> I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart,
> Copulation is no more rank to me than death is. (Whitman 47)

Recently, a friend recommended I read the Whitman chapter in Jonah Lehrer's *Proust Was a Neuroscientist.* Lehrer holds that Whitman's central poetic idea is this unity of mind and body.

> Whitman's fusion of body and soul was a revolutionary idea, as radical in concept as his free-verse form. At the time, scientists believed that our feelings came from the brain and that the body was just a lump of inert matter. But Whitman believed that our mind depended upon the flesh. He was determined to write poems about our "form complete." (1–2)

I didn't have Lehrer's interpretation in 1969, but I felt in my bones the truth of Whitman's mind/body oneness.

> I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
> The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
> The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue. (Whitman 44)

I knew that pleasure and pain affected my emotions, that my emotions affected my thinking, that my thinking affected my body. I knew physical manifestations of grief: the uncontrollable fluttering eyelid, the drawn muscles of the face, the palpable weight on the chest, breaths that never seemed deep enough, a restless mind teeming with indelible images and words I wish I'd spoken. A dichotomy of mind and body was false. "Song of Myself" began my slow journey to accept my experiences both good and ill, my mistakes, limitations, strengths, feelings, desires, even when they conflicted: "Do I contradict myself? / very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)" (Whitman 78).

* * *

Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984

I'd been teaching high school students 13 years and had traveled far from my roots in traditional literature. I was consumed with teaching courses in writing and film. That winter two friends and I drove to Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the Midwest Super-8 Film Festival. We spent an invigorating weekend watching wall-to-wall independently made films. We also explored this big university town we'd previously known only for Big Ten football. On State Street we spent hours in the original Border's Bookstore, founded in 1971. Two floors, thousands of square feet of books.

In a section devoted to history and biography I was drawn to an old friend: from a book cover Walt Whitman gazed at me. He was about 51 when the photo was taken, gray, vital, becalmed, his chin resting in his palm, the knuckles of his curled fingers buried in his beard. That semester, for the first time in years, I was teaching 19th-century American literature. We'd get to Whitman in the spring. His eyes were unwavering. "Well?" he seemed to ask.

Through Justin Kaplan's biography, *Walt Whitman: A Life,* I took up residence in 19th-century America. I was there with 19-year-old Whitman as he set type for the weekly newspaper he published above a stable, as he rode alongside teamsters on bustling New York City streets, as he assembled the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* and wrote anonymous reviews of it, as he and Emerson walked on the Boston Common five years later and Emerson exhorted him to remove sexual explicitness from the third edition, as he nursed Civil War casualties in the hospitals of Washington DC. I watched Whitman absorb his times, trust himself, and shape

his barbaric yawp. The biography made me remember anew my indebtedness to Whitman. When it came time to introduce my high school students to him, I decided I would do something dramatic to mark the seismic shift between *Leaves of Grass* and popular poetry of 1855 America.

* * *

Miami University, Two Weeks Later

I sat amid 25 English teachers gathered together by the Ohio Writing Project on a Saturday morning, our job to holistically score writing samples of nearly 1,000 eleventh graders. The first order of business was to introduce ourselves. When it came my turn, I said, with some exuberance, "I'm Tom Romano, and this morning I am imbued with the spirit of Walt Whitman."

"Oooh," said a teacher—a man—from across the room, "better watch out."

That got a titter. I knew, of course, what he was talking about: Whitman's sexuality. I felt slighted, my revived passion for Whitman cheapened and dismissed, but the comment spurred me to say more: "I'm reading a biography of Whitman. He makes me want to write and teach."

So many years earlier, when I first encountered Whitman, the professor had mentioned the poet's homosexuality—a sexual category, I've learned, that did not clearly exist in mid-19th-century America (Reynolds 591). At 19, I still lived amid those male, teenage years of rampant homophobia. But I now had "Song of Myself." Its inclusiveness, empathy, and continuity had resonated in me. My perspective was shifting. Grief and doubt were not all there were. Whitman homosexual? So be it. My world was broadening. There was a line from another piece of literature I read that year that described growth: "There are more things in heaven and earth, [Tom], than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

* * *

Edgewood High School, Trenton, Ohio, Room 107

I stepped into the classroom wearing a three-piece suit and properly knotted tie. I sought to look professorial, learned, traditional. Before we dived into Whitman, I had prepared last words to say about the button-downed, strictly metered, fiercely rhymed verse of the Fireside Poets. Beneath the suit, I wore blue jeans and boots. The shirt under my vest was pull-over linen, blowsy in the sleeves.

I recited lines from Longfellow's "Evangeline," a hugely popular poem in 1847, then removed my coat and vest. I sat down, took off my boots and pulled off the suit pants to reveal the jeans, all the while telling students about changes afoot in 19th-century America. Boots back on, I tucked the jeans into them, removed the tie, and opened the top button of my shirt. From the closet I retrieved a broad-brimmed hat and placed it atop my head. The transformation was complete, since I had a beard similar to Whitman's in the 1855 artist's copy of a daguerreotype that appeared in the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Reynolds 282).

"I celebrate myself and sing myself," I said, moving about the front of the classroom, comfortable, deliberate, insouciant. I searched for eyes I could look into. I sought to communicate both individuality and respect, taking that Whitman stance of moving forth "regardless of others, ever regardful of others" (Whitman 40), breathing the air but leaving plenty after me (41). Some students averted their eyes—this was too weird! Some were open-mouthed, astonished. Some smiled, appreciative of the risk. When I finished performing that first stanza, I removed my hat, became Mr. Romano again, and distributed excerpts from "Song of Myself." We launched our study of this iconoclastic, expansive, self-promoting, inclusive writer who changed how poetry was written in America, whose influence is felt to this day in poems read by Garrison Keillor on "The Writer's Almanac," in Billy Collins's "Poetry 180," in the speech of people when some of what they say, as William Stafford said, is "luckier than the rest" (97). After we'd read Whitman's sprawling lines, explored his philosophy of life and death and God, of men and women alike, after we'd noted his directness, his surprising word choice and perceptions, his deep empathy, we wrote. What we wrote were our own barbaric yawps, our own versions of "Song of Myself."

* * *

A friend has said I seem to be able to work Whitman into everything I write. An exaggeration, surely, but I get the spirit of his assertion. In writing my second book, for example, I found a Whitman quotation to use as an epigram for each chapter.

For writing about what matters: "Give me the drench of my passions."

For sticking with a draft when writing comes hard: "Here is what sings unrestricted faith."

For using narrative—not just exposition—to reveal truth: "Logic and sermons never convince / The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul."

For purposeful grammatical rule-breaking: "From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines."

For multigenre writing: "the varied carols I hear" (Romano, *Writing*).

Whitman didn't say it all, but he said much. He is with me more than any other author, a distant teacher who has been constant through the years, and "Song of Myself" has been my touchstone since I was 19. What writer has been your distant teacher? Has spoken truth to you? Has shown you possibility you hadn't imagined, roused your passions, awakened your conscience?

A critical assignment for my methods students is what I call a "literature relationship paper" (Romano, "Relationships"). I ask students to identify literature—and my definition of literature here is wide—that has "prompted [them] to take a look around," as Robert Coles put it in *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (54), literature that has become "a continuing presence in [their] lives" (68).

The last 17 years my students' choices of such literature has run the literary gamut: children's picture books, adolescent fiction, science fiction, fantasy, current best sellers, old standbys such as *Where the Red Fern Grows, The Catcher in the Rye, Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret,* poems by Shel Silverstein, Marge Piercy, and Robert Frost. Only a small percentage of my students—2% in this most recent cohort of 39—chose books typically regarded as historical, time-honored classics that were required reading in an English class.

I want my methods students—these soon-to-be purveyors of literature to teenagers—to remind themselves why they read. Through their essays students have shown me that literature matters to them for many reasons: because of their search for identity, their spiritual needs, their desire to escape to imaginative worlds, their evolving sense of justice. Some of my students have come through slaughter, and a book helped them understand that pain, fear, and despair. Literature seized their attention, gave them perspective, realigned their values, delighted them, thrilled them, sobered them. My college students have learned to find meaning in books. They do what Whitman invited: "I send you my poems that you behold in them what you wanted" (7). No students yet have written that what won them over to literature was the arc of the Victorian novel, or the qualities of Romanticism, or what a green light symbolized at the end of a dock. This doesn't surprise me. Literature matters to my students because of their wild and precious lives. They want them to make sense, to be meaningful. They want to find their way. And I understand. "I am the man. I suffered. I was there" (Whitman 59).

But what of the future students of my students? Most of those teenagers will not be predisposed to read literature. Only a small fraction of them will become English teachers. What will my students do to help their students become readers who know that books are one place to find ideas, possibilities, pleasures, escape, guidance, balm, inspiration, awakening? What, I ask my students, are they prepared to do so that their students develop significant relationships with literature and thus make reading a vital part of their lives?

* * *

NCTE Annual Convention, Philadelphia, 2009

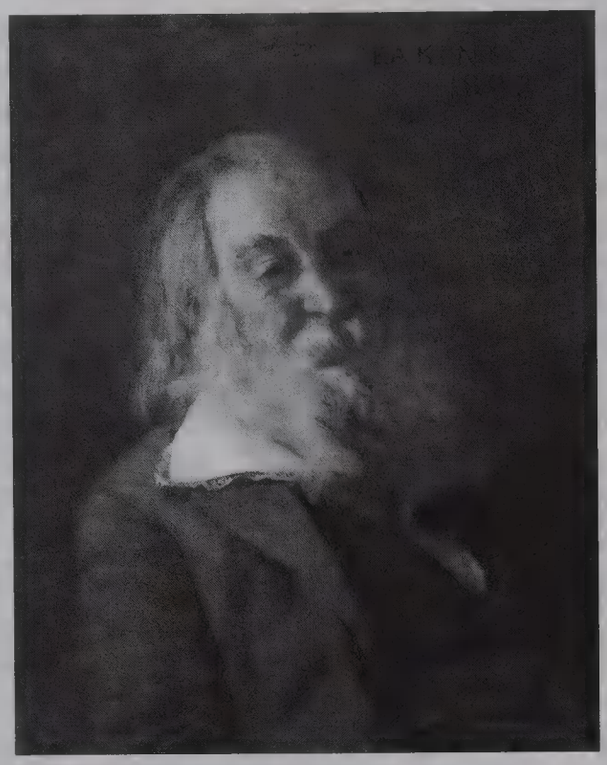
After our visit to Harleigh Cemetery that Saturday afternoon, Mariana and I attended the Heinemann Authors' Reception held at the Pennsylvania Fine Arts Academy. I looked forward each year to this gathering of voices old and new. One friend asked if I'd been to the gallery just off the reception area.

"There's a painting you need to see," she said.

I looked at her quizzically.

"It's of Whitman."

Mariana and I hurried to the gallery, a room the size of an overly wide basketball court. My eyes fixed on the back wall, and I moved swiftly toward that famous portrait of Whitman painted by Thomas Eakins in 1887, when Whitman was 68, five years before his death. One Whitman biographer described "a ruddiness and humor to the painting" (Reynolds 564). You could see where the "good gray poet" tag came from. Whitman's long,



Walt Whitman, oil on canvas by Thomas Eakins

thinning hair was swept back, falling to his shoulders. The full beard was shaggy, growing white, concealing his cheeks, lips, and chin. Mariana said the eyes were glassy and merry as he looked out on us in amusement.

"You were in awe, Pops," she told me later. "To think that you would stumble onto that treasure after our trek through one of the worst parts of a city I'd ever seen and then to Whitman's tomb tucked into the side of the hill in Harleigh."

Indeed. Seeing that painting was an amazing denouement to a rewarding day and fulfilling conference. There had been stimulating talks, exciting teaching ideas, books aplenty in the exhibit hall, and lots of camaraderie. I went to the reception area and grabbed a friend, Maja Wilson, whose *Rethinking Rubrics in Writing Assessment* had challenged the reverential status of using rubrics to assess writing. It was Maja who had recommended the Whitman chapter in *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (Lehrer). I wondered how the unprecedented "Song of Myself" would have faired against a rubric designed in 1855 to measure the quality of a poem.

The reception was nearing its end, the Fine Arts Academy closing. I rushed to find one more friend, Penny Kittle, whose *Write Beside Them: Voice, Risk, and Clarity in High School Writing* had won that year's NCTE Britton Award, and was a book my methods students were reading. I took Penny's arm, interrupting her conversation.

"You been to that room?"

Penny raised her eyebrows, no doubt surprised by my rudeness and curious about my urgency.

"There's something you need to see," I said.

I marched off toward the gallery. Penny caught up with me, our point of view like a camera dollying in as we entered the room. Penny scanned the walls.

"Straight ahead," I said.

She began describing a huge canvas of a woman in red.

"Not that one," I said. "To the left."

Penny's eyes skipped right over the small Eakins portrait to another large canvas she began describing.

"Not that one," I said. "Straight ahead."

"Is that . . . ."

And then we all gazed—Penny, Maja, Mariana, and me—standing in an adoring semicircle before the painting, we four lit lovers who knew what Whitman meant to writing in America, we four writing teachers who wanted a particle of Whitman's spirit in each of our students, so they would behold miracles in the smallest as well as the largest, so they would press forward with words on paper, take risks, and revise revise revise.

"It's the eyes," Penny said. "They give the small portrait real fire."

"Smallness and greatness," Maja said, "all in the same breath."

"Whitman's spirit fills the room," said Mariana.

I beamed, wordless, standing with my three language-loving friends, me an ever-striving teacher, a sometime writer, a doting father, a grateful son of so many mentors in my lifetime. I wished that my 39 methods students had been in the gallery. We would have made room for them in the semicircle. "All goes onward and outward," wrote Whitman. "Nothing collapses" (32).

I never felt it truer.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Tom Romano's description of Walt Whitman is powerful! He fully immerses himself and his students in Whitman. "Style: Defining and Exploring an Author's Stylistic Choices" invites students to find examples of specific stylistic devices in sample literary passages. Then they search for additional examples and, in a whole-group discussion, they explore the reasons for the stylistic choices that the author has made. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/style-defining-exploring-author-209.html

Section 52 of *Song of Myself*

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my
loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable.
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

—Walt Whitman

S. Rebecca Leigh and Ron Cramer

Two Voice Poem: A Conversation with Writers on Writing

In a unique format, Leigh and Cramer raise compelling ideas about writing from more than 30 authors.

Writers know writing. They have acquired knowledge that enables them to successfully practice the art and craft of writing. Writing is their work and livelihood, their frustration and pleasure, their success and failure. Every day they navigate its treacherous rivers, climb its highest mountains, and sink into its deepest valleys of despair. Yet they emerge successfully from their continuing struggle with the art and craft of writing. We believe that writers—Ernest Hemingway, Ralph Fletcher, Joan Didion, and others—can provide guidance that will help teachers and students learn writer's craft.

We have combed writers' essays, books, interviews, and articles to locate nuggets of advice professional writers have offered over the years. In a two voice poem, we have sorted writers' ideas into seven categories: riffing, self-discovery, artful, drafting, discouraging, revising, and personal. We believe these ideas can inspire and inform teachers and students about writing.

In what follows, conversation is shared: our voice is on the left; the paraphrased voices of professional writers are on the right. The initials following each writer's voice signify which writer is speaking. The key to decoding the full name of each writer appears in the sidebar.

This poem invites two groups or two individuals to read the poem aloud, as though performing a choral reading. Text on the same horizontal line is read simultaneously whereas the respective left or right voice is read on different lines. While reading, keep in mind the possibilities for expressive voice: soft, loud, thoughtful, playful. Also, decide what gestures, actions, or movements will enhance the reading. With due respect for rhythm, intonation, and synchronicity, your voices should create what Paul Fleishman calls a musical duet.

Writing Is Riffing

Ideas emerge when we riff.

Yes, sometimes.

Ideas emerge as we write.

Ideas from pictures, from words,
from music, from people. We riff in
writer's notebooks.

Writing Is Riffing

We begin with a mental picture. (WF)

Or we write, write, write, (RF)
draw, draw, draw, (BO)
or read, read, read. (TC)

When we look closely at life. (AL)
Riffing is getting ideas down. (MA)

Especially the ones that feel right, like a
shoe. (LL)

Yeah.

BRAOOUUMMM. Portable friends.

We sure are different.

We're different,

Maybe because we're collectors?

When we riff, we explore.

When we riff, we discover.

Writing Is Self-Discovery

Creative territory.

Trust our voice and poetic eye.

Makes sense.

Right. How else can we voyage into the unknown? Discover ourselves as writers?

PSST. Hey, voice. Are you in there?

It makes us.

You bet. We watch. We wait. We listen.

With writer's eyes, right?

That can be scary.

AHHHHH, the trip.

To find ourselves in ink.

Uh-huh.

They jump start the mind. (RF)

Opening them up unstuck us. (LL)

You can say that again.

'cause a lot of people watch stuff and go, "That's cool," but we write it down. (LL)

We know how to sit down, relax, be receptive, open. (DM)

We explore ways of writing that might work. (MA)

Writing Is Self-Discovery

Yes. The mind is the writer's landscape. (NG)

We must trust it. Trust the process. (SM)

It's there when we choose our own topics for writing. (WF)

We emerge when we have ownership. We're talking 80% choice, 20% prompt. (DG)

We can stalk our inner voice. (RF)

Seriously. We see something. It clicks with something else. It makes a story. (SK)

Writers are ruthless spies. (LL)

We look at her but we're watching him. (LL)

We know writing is like night driving. We can see as far as our headlights. (ELD in AL)

True, but we shine on anyway 'cause we can still make the trip. (ELD in AL)

It really is an excuse to do things, to go places, to explore. (AL)

Of course. The very act is one of discovery. (NG)

Of course.

Writing Is Artful

So many ways to nurture ideas.

We listen.

By reading people.
By reading literature.

We really are readers.

Books are company.

We're wordsmiths.

GLUG-GLUG-GLUG,

We're specific.

We're present,

Right-o!

Draft after draft,

Writing Is Drafting

Ugly first; pretty later.

Come again?

Right-Write-Right. Not perfect.

Don't surrender. Keep writing.

Regularity is a moving pen.

The practice of asserting ourselves. (NG)
Making our words say, "I am." (DG)
Writing to find out how we feel about things. (JD)

Writing Is Artful

We let them grow heavy in the mind, like a ripe pear, pendant and gravid. (VW in JC)

Sure, by developing ears for dialogue. We learn to eavesdrop. (RF)

By reading touchstone texts, too. (LC)

We read like writers. (KWR)
We learn from the company we keep. (FS)

Yes. They help us create believable characters in credible, moving ways. (WF)

Sure. We use words that stand like single malt whiskey, (CL)

sometimes making the reader wait for the good stuff. (KP)

Writing is beautiful when it's clear. (RF)

'cause writers pay attention
to e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g. (LL)
'Cause we don't know what we
know until we write it. (FO)

Ditto! (DM)

we use our words to lie in other people's skins. (ELD in DM)

Writing Is Drafting

Get black on white. (GM in DM)

Just get started. Doesn't have to be good.
Just has to be. (AL)

Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor. (AL)

'Cause regularity is the secret. (LM in DM)

Movin' along, Movin' along.

Rollin' Rollin' Rollin'

Practice, practice, practice.

When is the best time to write?

Drafting is refining.

And if it's bad? Gangrene bad?

Or keep it? Save it for something else?

Start with rubbish, end with gold.

Even rubbish can be a starting point.

Writing Is Discouraging

When the rubbish seems FOREVER-ISH

lowlowlowlowlow.

Keep writing, typing, sketching, thinking.

That's a tough one. Who likes verbal diarrhea on the page?

He's a writer. She's a writer. We're writers!

DOESN'T.

SHOULDN'T.

and get on with it.
TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP

Writing Is Revising

Revising is a pain.

Can it be both pain and pleasure?

Five pages every morning. (LM in DM)

Twenty lines a day, genius or not. (S in DM)

Teachers, your kids must write *at least* forty minutes a day, four days a week. (DG)

It's no secret. We must write. (DG)

Doesn't matter. Write first, wash later is one writer's advice. (WHA in DM)

Yes, it's low-grade ore. Gold starts with low-grade ore. So does good writing. (JD)

Throw it out. Start over. (TG in RC)

Yes. Ideas stick around. (DM)

UH-HUH. We don't wait for inspiration. That's just plain lazy. (JL in RC)

Writing Is Discouraging

Writing can be a low dread. (JD)

But lowness goes away when we keep going. (JD)

Remember. We teach ourselves by our own mistakes. We learn only by error. (WF)

Doesn't matter. We're brave, we say it anyway: "I am a writer." (NG)

Besides, anyone who wants to be a writer and isn't writing?
DOESN'T. (EH in DM)
And anyone who takes rejection too seriously?
SHOULDN'T. (FO)
And anyone who asks, What am I trying to say here? Should just say it (RF)

Writing Is Revising

No. It's a pleasure. (JCO)

Yes, but mostly pleasure. (TM in DM)

O BROTHER!

Makes you think.

When should we start revising?

Revising has three faces. Right?

Hmmm.

Sure does. Not easy.

Takes writers who know.

What do you say, Ernie?

What do you say, Leo?

What do you say, Dr. Seuss?

YIKES!

Read it. Leave it. Come back to it.

Teachers can do it, too.

And it's not the same as editing.

Revising has a higher purpose.

Writing Is Personal

REALLY MATTER.
Violence.

Humor.

Topics that speak to the heart. Softer gifts.
Tolerance. Tenderness. Truth.

Poetic, novelistic, mythic, factual,

Whatever it is, it's hard work. (FO)

Makes you rethink. (DG)

Think Sinatra: Do it your way. (DM)

Yes. Adding. Cutting. Rearranging. (BL)

Takes guts to cut. (KV)

Nope, so we tell kids the truth. (WF)
Writing is hard work, takes time,
takes practice. (JD)

Hemingway, here.
Tolstoy, check.
Seuss, check, check.

I revised the ending to *A Farewell to Arms*
39 times. (EH in DM)

I rewrote *War and Peace* eight times.
(LT in DM)

Twenty pages tossed for every page
published. (TG)

But we make it happen 'cause there are no
shortcuts. (WF)

Kids can do it. (LC)

But here's a tip: Revision is not a hunt for
errors. (NR)

No way. Never. Nada.

It's about meaning. It's the difference
between lightning and the lightning bug.
(MT in RR)

Writing Is Personal

We grapple with topics that matter
REALLY MATTER. (RF)

Fantasy.

Reality.

Good writing is about telling the truth. (AL)

scientific, research truth.

BA-BUMP, a boy writes about his dog,
BA-BUMP, a teen and her addiction,
BA-BUMP, the classroom, the cornerstone for such talk.

Writing that BA-BUMPS. And when we talk,
pour over those single malt words,

we listen. To each other. To ourselves.
To the page.

Soulful stories slow us down, too.

Right. The heart knows. The heart can always feel when the content of our ink is real or not.

Writers are interested in the truth of the human heart. (WF)

Conversation can lead to writing that accepts. (NG)

or those funny, silly GRIVEL-IT-IN-THE-FLOSH words, (KB)

Writing is a speed bump; it slows us down. (SK)

They affect the drive of our hand, don't forget. (SK)

KEEP IT REAL. KEEP IT HONEST. (WF)

Why This Conversation Matters

Sinking into your chair with a favorite writer is a luxurious way to spend time; it is also necessary. Reading is where our conversations with writers begin but not where they end. A conversation requires an exchange. A serious reader listens to a writer and talks back. If there is no talking back, there is no conversation. Talking back connects us intellectually and emotionally to what we read. When we engage in a serious conversation with a writer, we ask questions, we dispute assertions, we say amen. We sink deeper into our chairs as we sink deeper into our conversation. Only when we have sunk deeply into our conversation can the magic of an intimate reader-writer connection occur. Only then can we identify the devices in the writer's toolbox. Only then can we dance in step with the rhythm of the writer's words and ideas.

Extended intimate conversation gives us access to the writer's craft. Donald Graves says that the experience of having a serious conversation with a writer makes an *imprint* on the reader's mind. An imprint remains and is recognizable for a long time. It does not easily or quickly disappear. Imprinting explains why some books, some writers, some ideas hold us in our chairs longer than others and cause us to sink more deeply into our creative and personal potential.

Lester Laminack, a children's author, says that craft is audible before it is visual. Indeed, we are attending to writer's craft whenever we hear a sentence that causes us to reread it. We can feel the writer's words on our tongues; we take in sentences as if they were edible. We read and read again because we want to get closer to what writers do and how they do it. We seek to discover writers' craft. Reading and rereading for craft matters on two levels. First, we want to develop craft in our own writing. Second, we want to engage young writers in discussions about craft so that they can discover and develop writers' craft themselves.

Here's where to begin. Start three conversations about writing. Start a conversation with yourself; start a conversation with writers; start a conversation about writers with your students. Do not wait around for that elusive grand conversation with administrators and policymakers. Nobody can keep you from having grand conversations with yourself, with writers, and with your students.

AUTHOR KEY

AL: Anne Lamott
BL: Barry Lane
BO: Beth Olshansky
CL: Carl Leggo
DG: Donald Graves
DM: Donald Murray
EH in DM: Ernest Hemingway in Donald Murray
ELD in AL: E. L. Doctorow in Anne Lamott
ELD in DM: E. L. Doctorow in Donald Murray
FO: Frank O'Connor
FS: Frank Smith
GM in DM: Guy de Maupassant in Donald Murray
JCO: Joyce Carol Oates
JD: Joan Didion
JL in RC: Jack London in Ronald Cramer
KB: Kylene Beers
KP: Katherine Paterson
KV: Kurt Vonnegut
KWR: Katie Wood Ray
LC: Lucy Calkins
LL: Lester Laminack
LM in DM: Larry McMurtry in Donald Murray
LT in DM: Leo Tolstoy in Donald Murray
MA: Marc Aronson
MT in RR: Mark Twain in R. Kent Rasmussen
NG: Natalie Goldberg
RF: Ralph Fletcher
S in DM: Stendhal in Donald Murray
SK: Stephen King
SM: Shaun McNiff
TC: Truman Capote
TG in RC: Theodore Geisel in Ronald Cramer
TM in DM: Toni Morrison in Donald Murray
WHA in DM: W. H. Auden in Donald Murray
VW in JC: Virginia Woolf in James Charlton
WF: William Faulkner

Final Thoughts

Listen. Sixty-five had none, 30 had one, five had two, and no one had more than two. These percentages represent individual responses to the question, "Tell us about a teacher who saw something in you worth writing about and then helped you write it." Teacher-researcher of writing Donald Graves provides these startling statistics on the status of writing in the United States in his foreword to Bernice E. Cullinan's *Pen in Hand: Children Become Writers.* These numbers reflect a 1978 study.

Keep listening. According to the *What's Hot* list for 2009, a survey published yearly in *Reading Today* by the International Reading Association, writing is labeled *cold* some 30 years after Graves's study. It also ranked as one of the "coldest topics" in 2008. Chilling news. Why is writing getting the cold shoulder? Are teachers feeling pressure to teach to the test? Is support for writing instruction lacking? Are teachers simply not interested in writing themselves? Many reasons exist but if one of the reasons is reluctance to admit our uncertainties about how to teach writing, students will bear the burden of our uncertainty.

So listen. Young writers look to us for opportunities to write their way into this world. Write with them. Bring writing in from the cold to the morning meeting carpet, to the classroom campfire. We don't have to travel far to discover ways to improve our writing practices. Create spaces for language to fill the air, to tumble over us, to protect us, to nurture us. Be aware of the literature that surrounds our students, our bookshelves, and the beanbag areas of our classrooms. Read aloud literature in which students can see themselves so that their writing includes, celebrates, and accepts.

Our hope is that on the heels of reading our two voice poem, one or two writers spoke to you and that you will read more about them. Take them back to your classroom. Get a sink-worthy chair, or maybe a beanbag will do. Sink into the pleasure of learning about writing from writers whose craft you respect and admire.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

The authors of the article shared their knowledge of writing in a two voice poem. "Sonic Patterns: Exploring Poetic Techniques through Close Reading" helps students to develop background knowledge about allusions and the etymology of key words, while using an online tool to examine the relationship between the speaker and his father in Robert Hayden's "Those Winter Sundays." Students then explore how the poet uses consonance, assonance, and alliteration to illustrate this complex relationship. Finally students use the idea of a composed memory and their knowledge of sonic patterns to draft, revise, and share original text. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/sonic-patterns-exploring-poetic-1157.html

Challenging Texts

For me, the strongest reason for teaching *Walden* is that it forces us to confront the question which we often fail to ask ourselves; Why are we here? How should we spend our lives? How should we interact with our neighbors, both human and wild? What are our responsibilities to society and, more importantly, to ourselves?

—*Jeffrey Cramer, curator of collections, Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods*

Teaching Deliberately: Reading Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*

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One of the more difficult 19th-century American texts for high school students to read is undoubtedly Henry David Thoreau's *Walden.* His erudite allusions, often page-long sentences, and sophisticated sense of the ironic initially leave many students cold. Still, I encourage them to read amid the din of a cultural cacophony that shouts "old and outdated" and "tree-hugging dreamer" when confronted with Thoreau's life and work.

Like many humans, Thoreau is often profoundly misunderstood; Henry was no hermit, did not run *from* life so much as run *to* it—intensely and thoughtfully, at least for two years and two months at Walden Pond from 1845 to 1847. His journals written while living there were later compiled into what we know as *Walden; or Life in the Woods.*

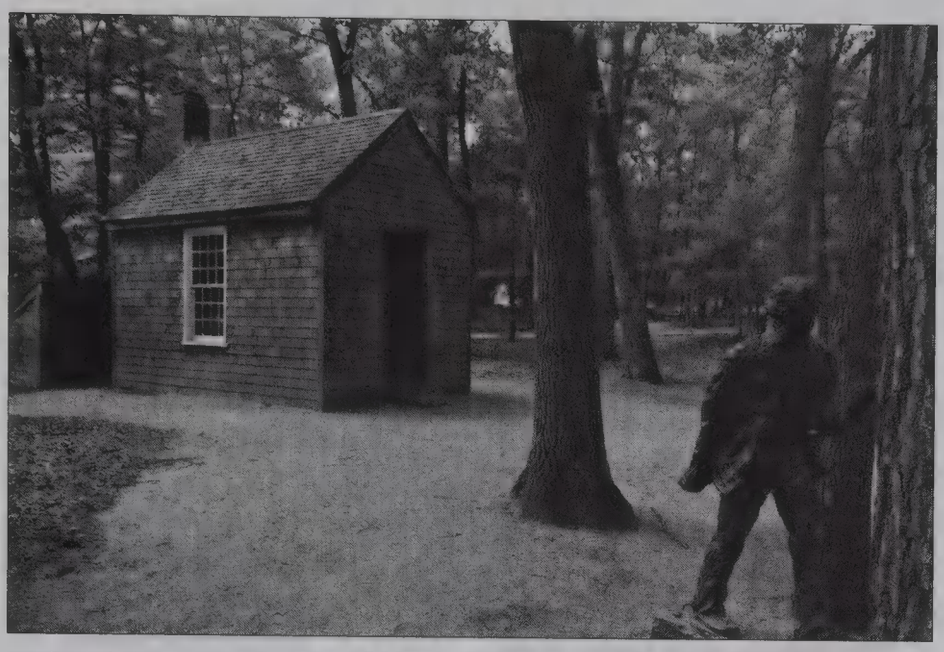
Why bother with this difficult text? Do we teach it because we know somehow it is "good" for us, akin to eating our spinach? I suggest that rather than relegate Thoreau's writing to the necessary but bitter castor oil of literature, we should consider his masterwork to be an ideal vehicle for challenging our complacency amid desperation, a text that crows at us repeatedly to wake up, wake up! What could be more necessary for our students than to wake up and question just what it is, as the poet Mary Oliver writes, "you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?" (94). For this is exactly what Thoreau asks his readers.

Thoreau is often profoundly misunderstood; Henry was no hermit, did not run *from* life so much as run *to* it—intensely and thoughtfully.

Into the Woods

I steel myself for the first class after the initial reading assignment, when students arrive with long-suffering looks after wading through "Economy," and offer some sympathy. "For many," E. B. White wrote on the centenary of *Walden*'s publication, "it is a great deal too odd, and for many it is a particular bore" (292). He adds later, however, that the book is "the best youth's companion yet written by an American, for it carries a solemn warning against the loss of one's valuables, it advances a good argument for traveling light and trying new adventures . . . and it steadfastly refuses to record bad news" (293).

From that one sentence by White I structure a foray of lessons into the gist of Thoreau's thinking in *Walden.* For here is a text that truly offers the ideal venue for critical literacy; it provides the reader the opportunity, first, to question who one *is* rather than who one wishes to be and, second, to question how one defines a life of success or happiness. These are two subjects about which every young (and old) person is curious. Using White's synopsis of the dictums found in the book, I ask students to tussle with



Replica of Thoreau's cabin near Walden Pond. (Photo by RhythmicQuietude, 2010. Used by permission under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License 3.0.)

what their real "valuables" are: Is it your iPhone or your sense of humor? And what might "traveling light" mean? What burdens of thought are best let go so we can approach this world without our predisposed judgments?

In "Economy" Thoreau describes the four essentials needed for survival—food, shelter, clothing, and fuel—providing an ideal framework from which we can question as a class, and a culture, the difference between our needs and wants, as well as the real (not necessarily monetary) price we pay for our extravagant desires in each category. Students readily identify the results of over-consuming in each domain: the epidemic of obesity, the current mortgage crisis in which unaffordable homes have wrought ruin, our credit card dependence on wearing the latest fashions, and the awareness that our overreliance on fossil fuels is ephemeral. But rather than being a depressing admonishment of our wrongs, *Walden* offers the reader the opportunity to question the need for all our "stuff," challenging us to buck the tide, and "simplify, simplify" (88). The idea of *choice* in how we live may be Thoreau's central message. Speaking directly to the teenage renegade in all of us he suggests that "[i]f a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away" (317).

While studying *Walden,* I take my class to Walden State Park in Concord, Massachusetts. Our guide, Jeffrey Cramer, curator of collections at the neighboring Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods, shares a story with us while we sit in the woods where Thoreau's cabin once stood.

If we wish to "explore how we can enrich our classrooms with literature and text that *confront the world*" ("Challenging" 81; italics in original) as P. L. Thomas suggests, then I cannot think of a better book by which to do this. Thoreau unabashedly confronts "the way things are," from our addictive consumption to putting off "real living" until too often we are unable to enjoy it. His challenges are as relevant today as they were in 1845. If we consider critical literacy as "thinking from the margins, of possessing integral perspectives on the world" (Lankshear and McLaren 27), then *Walden* offers just this. What is it we truly *need* to live? How do we distinguish between *wants* and *needs?* Do we really need the latest app for our iPhone or that new style of jeans? For a modern-day perspective on these same questions, look at Barbara Kingsolver's essays. Thomas's *Reading, Learning, Teaching Barbara Kingsolver* provides suggestions for using her work as a resource for critical pedagogy. Kingsolver, like Thoreau, "will also ask teachers and students to confront the world, to confront concepts often held so sacred that they are never reconsidered, thus allowed to wilt—capitalism, democracy, freedom, ecology, war, peace, human dignity" (3–4).

While studying *Walden,* I take my class to Walden State Park in Concord, Massachusetts. Our guide, Jeffrey Cramer, curator of collections at the neighboring Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods, shares a story with us while we sit in the woods where Thoreau's cabin once stood. Desirous for a telescope with which to view birds, Thoreau contemplated his purchase over several weeks, determining how many hours he would have to work to make the

purchase and whether it was ultimately worth the work time—time, he felt, that took him away from living. Ultimately he decided to make the purchase and used the telescope for many years to come. Long after our field trip students recall this story, admitting that often the impulse purchase is their main style of shopping, rarely considering the hours of work necessitated by the seductiveness of instant gratification.

I want students to challenge the status quo by exploring how texts can both open and shut doors to make us "comfortable" and immune from the difficulty of living the examined life. Just as Socrates opined that the unexamined life is not worth living, Thoreau looked about him and noted that "[t]he mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (6). Thoreau used his writing to challenge the accepted way to live, for he saw in that challenge an opportunity to practice true democracy, to become autonomous rather than an automaton.

Misperceptions and Misinformation

From the outset of studying *Walden* and Thoreau, both filled with contradictions (like most humans), it is necessary to address some common myths. Many people, whether they have read the book or not, hold some piece of misinformation about *Walden* and its author.

I like to dismiss the Nature Boy routine early on—"the mass of men have an indistinct notion that its author was a sort of Nature Boy" (White 292). This is the tree-hugger myth that my students seem ready to latch onto and at which they often smirk with derision, letting me know that they have much more important things to do with their lives than watch the ice melt on a pond. As Cramer emphasizes, "Every misconception about Thoreau comes from thinking about *Walden* as a book about how we should go build a cabin in the woods and live simply off the land. My favorite way of looking at it is to say that *Walden* is not a book about a man living in the woods but about a man living. That positioning makes all the difference." For a wealth of biographical information to disarm the myths, the Walden Woods Project website (http://www.walden.org) offers a rich resource. Two other valuable websites are the Thoreau Society (http://www.thoreausociety.org) and Life with Principle: Thoreau's Voice in Our Time (http://www.lifewithprinciple.org).

Though he did live in the woods (part of Emerson's ten-acre spread in Concord, Massachusetts), Thoreau did not espouse living "off the land." He made no bones about his need for conversation, often dining with the Emersons and walking into town to chat with his neighbors. He was not a survivalist. He, in fact, worked odd jobs the entire time he lived at Walden to support himself and used his solitude to write (Cramer). That he honed his power of observation to celebrate the natural beauty of Walden Pond and his waking up to being alive has too often been misinterpreted as a "back to nature" sojourn.

I feel as though I've failed at teaching Thoreau if when we finish the book a student writes that the central message is for us all to go "live off the land" and "contemplate Nature." It is not that these endeavors are inherently unworthy, but they are so loaded with innuendo that their stating serves to mask the deeper understandings Thoreau's work offers. In arguing for the importance of the humanities, Mark Slouka suggests that often, to avoid discomfort with difficult questions, educators "teach *Walden,* if we teach it at all, as an ode to Nature and ignore its full-frontal assault on the tenets of capitalism" (39).

Who Are You?

Walk through any high school and it becomes clear that students are exploring identities. Alfred W. Tatum writes about the importance of making the focus of our teaching literature the students and their identities rather than the texts: "Adolescents find texts meaningful and significant when they tap one of their identities. . . . The texts students will remember or find meaningful are texts that move them to feel differently about themselves, that affect their views of themselves" (84). Often *Walden* is considered the antithesis of a meaningful text for teens. I believe just the opposite; Thoreau offers his reader that rare opportunity to truly get to know oneself. Thoreau's experiment was to remove himself from the way everyone around him was living to discover just what living was for. For many students this is appealing—the notion that seeking one's inner compass is the essential work of living. The DVD-ROM *Life with Principle: Thoreau's Voice in Our*

Time offers terrific materials that focus on linking Thoreau's ideas with modern-day living. Most compelling are the interviews with high school students who tie Thoreau's ideas to their lives. Ultimately, as Thoreau writes, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. . . . I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life" (87). Far from "escaping to nature," Henry escaped *to* himself.

In an age of accountability and data-driven decision-making, let's not forget that there are some things that cannot be measured and crunched into a record sheet. Wrestling with one's identity through reading, writing, thinking, and discussing is worthwhile work in the English classroom. We are dishonest at best if we ignore the humanity that made us want to be teachers of the humanities in the first place. *Walden* offers an alternative lens through which to view one's life: "I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours" (Thoreau 314). What better advice can be given to old and young alike?

Stop, Look, and Listen

Thoreau witnessed the nascent beginnings of man's love affair with technology some 160 years ago with the arrival of the railroad—"We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us" (89). Rather than questioning whether technology is good or evil, students can explore how technology has altered our view of the world. Reading selections from Neil Postman's *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology,* students consider how their lives—their interactions with other humans and how they perceive the world—have been forever changed with the advent of Facebook, Twitter, texting, and cell phones. Postman suggests technology has created a new way of being in and seeing the world. Students begin to grasp that inventions from the railroad to television result in much more than an "add-on" to our understanding of the world; they change the way we perceive the world. They see Thoreau's ideas not as outdated ramblings of a hermit who escaped to the woods but as the thoughts of a deep and committed thinker, a man who saw the need to question his society's wholesale embrace of each new invention.

We expect young people to be articulate and focused, to have a plan for their futures, yet they barely have a second to contemplate the world in order to develop these plans.

Are You Happy?

What could be more culturally relevant and important than how we define happiness and success—truly what we plan to do with our one wild and precious life. Was Thoreau successful? First we must define success and, therefore, happiness. This requires a discussion about our life's purpose. For students to consider this question I use two chapters from the best-seller *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lifetime Fulfillment* by Harvard professor Tal Ben-Shahar in which he draws from Thoreau's work, framing his book around interactive exercises in which readers explore what happiness means to them. It is no surprise that Ben-Shahar's course on happiness is the most popular in the history of Harvard; my students begged to read the entire book for class.

Through our discussions we find that happiness has much to do with living *deliberately*—and we return to Thoreau: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately" (87). What does living deliberately mean for a 16-year-old in 21st-century America in this must-be-busy-must-always-be-doing-something society? The question provides a rich field for harvesting ideas that define deliberate living.

American culture is rife with aphorisms that encourage us to action: "idle hands are the devil's work" and "he who hesitates is lost." Yet there are few suggestions made to our overly busy students to stop and examine who they are, what they feel, and why they feel that way. We expect young people to be articulate and focused, to have a plan for their futures, yet they barely have a second to contemplate the world in order to develop these plans. Listen to your students describe a typical school day: homework, sports, a part-time job, texting, tweeting, Facebooking, and seven hours in school will make your head spin.

As one student, Jennifer Bryant, wrote in her post-*Walden* essay,

> "In countless ways society distracts us from being able to propel towards our personal goals. We are urged by example to constantly be doing the various activities of society, which often result in us doing multiple activities at a time. I find myself doing this frequently. Like the majority of my peers I am drawn daily into the world of texting, checking my Facebook, and 'Googling' wonderfully 'useful' things such as whether Allison or Kris was voted off on 'American Idol.' I may go through a whole day without any time in silence. In fact I have many friends who cannot even go to sleep without listening to their iPods or iPod touches."

Thoreau doesn't offer answers to life's questions but encourages readers to consider how life is lived, and ultimately, I believe, he offers the wisdom of making a *choice* in how we go about our lives.

A Path to Which We Return

Rather than approach Thoreau with a series of quizzes assessing students' knowledge of allusions and the definition of Transcendentalism (I've been guilty of this in the past), I offer reading *Walden* as a central axis for the ideas that will develop throughout the year, a baseline for critical inquiry.

Walden offers our students the opportunity to question their own existence—the race to the top (of SAT scores, college acceptances, careers), not to run from this life, but to critically observe it. The unquestioning pursuit of society's version of success leads many to lives of quiet desperation. "Thoreau was a seeker, a seer, a teacher. Being confident, not convinced, he would not complacently let yesterday's answer settle today's discourse" (Cramer).

Thoreau a hermit? Of course not. Comfortable in his own solitude? Unequivocally, yes. That is something to which we all might aspire, for when we find comfort in ourselves, realization of *who* we are, then is it not possible to offer that comfort to others in the most basic gesture of mankind? This, I believe, is the real gift of *Walden.*

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Valerie Kinloch, Editor

Innovative Writing Instruction

When It Happens "Across": Writing as Transformative and Expansive

This is the final essay for the "Innovative Writing Instruction" column for *English Journal.* Over the last three years, I have had the wonderful opportunity to both write and edit submissions that describe innovative, intriguing, and practice-oriented ideas related to teaching writing. Essay topics ranged from encouraging students to adopt an interpretive attitude as they become self-reflexive thinkers, to questioning meanings of writing in the midst of economic and political change, and rethinking writing through vocabulary instruction. Additional essays, among many others, focused on listening to diverse stories about writing from a former high-school teacher, a doctoral student, and a university supervisor, as well as using technology to engage in 21st-century writing practices with preservice and inservice teacher educators. As I sit here writing this last essay for the column, I am grappling with what to say that has not already been said. I am also deeply contemplating what to write that will encourage those reading this column to walk into their classrooms and the communities that surround their schools with a renewed sense of urgency to engage in critical, transformative literacy work with students.

Thus, I offer this challenge to the readers of IWI and to myself: We should individually and collectively (re)commit ourselves to critical and transformative literacy teaching and research that begin with, include, and acknowledge the lived and literate experiences of students.

A mere refusal of what appears to be a simple challenge might result in an unfortunate, ongoing proliferation of stereotypic images of students as disconnected and teachers as uncaring, particularly regarding acts and practices of literacy. Yet as many of us know, this is not an easy challenge, and it does not come with cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all strategies. However, it is a necessary challenge to work toward, one that can begin with examining our transactions in the world, which leads into the ways we transact within our classrooms and with our students. As educational researcher Bob Fecho asserts, let us "immerse ourselves in looking closely at the transactions we make across cultures" (157). In so doing, he asks that we regularly think about our classrooms, students, transactions, and our work as we "wonder aloud and silently, alone and with colleagues, early and late, with students and because of students" (157).

Furthermore, it is Fecho's hope "that we see the work of learners and teachers as something infinitely worthy of all this close examination . . . that we come to respect the intellect of every child and every teacher by expecting them to transact within rather than just occupy space" (157). It is this transacting *within space* that can lead to rich possibilities for how we come to think about and practice literacy. This is important, especially as such transactions relate to writing, reading, critical thinking, civic engagements, social justice, and the ways we might better understand ourselves and other people in an increasingly diverse world.

Writing Across, or Writing as Across

Fecho's thinking about transactions "alone and with colleagues, early and late" (157) leads me to ask: What might it mean to be committed, or to become recommitted, to critical and transformative literacy work for the sake of our students, our colleagues, and ourselves? And what does writing and writing instruction have to do

with this? As I think through these questions in light of themes that have emerged repeatedly over the last three years from essays published in this space, I assert that those of us who teach writing must regularly engage in conversations with *all* teachers about how our work with and on writing connects to work that students are doing across the entire curriculum. In other words, writing and writing instruction are not and should not be considered the sole responsibility of teachers of English, composition, and/or humanities-based courses. As we all know, writing happens everywhere and all the time (see Cushman; Dyson; Fecho; Kinloch). Writing occurs in our classrooms and communities as well as on the trains, subways, buses, and in the cars that transport us to and from school and/or work. Writing happens when students are working to solve algebraic equations in mathematics classes, learning to use historical and primary source texts in social studies classes, creating murals and studying aesthetics in art classes, mapping local community sites in geography classes, and experimenting with meaning-making processes in science classes.

Indeed, writing happens across the curriculum. However, we—those of us who teach and/or focus on writing—are not always explicit with colleagues and students about how writing happens across sociocultural contexts in ways that are more expansive than the space of and work that occurs within our individual, content-specific courses. For the most part, it is not completely our fault for the lack of such explicitness, given that the teaching and doing of writing carry an outdated rap (e.g., sentence diagramming, five-paragraph restrictions, writing that is detached from the personal) with an assumed governing board (e.g., English teachers in wool skirts or wearing plaid ties). As we challenge this rap, we must ask: Who teaches and does not teach writing, and why? How can the teaching and doing of writing across the entire curriculum help our students and us better transact within the world?

Writing as Expansive and Transformative

Just as writing happens within and across classrooms, it also occurs and is present in familial settings. Consider, for example, the many to-do lists we write, the text messages we send and receive, and the love notes, poems, or voluntary journal entries we pen. Or, think about the signs of writing that daily bombard us, from random "status updates" on Facebook and videos on YouTube, billboards that sell products by advertising persuasive messages, to the clothing people wear that dons popular sayings and images, the writings that decorate school bulletin boards, and the units that guide instructional work.

Now consider how we all have personal and political stories that we can exchange, stories that may involve our identities as raced and gendered beings, on the one hand, and our fights against injustices, on the other hand. These stories can serve as powerful testaments of our varied and various lives and to the ways in which our transactions in the world are affected by diversity and difference, inclusion and exclusion. Drawing on these stories in school and community settings, in our work with students, and in our collaborations with colleagues can contribute to expansive perspectives as involves literacy, generally, and writing, particularly. It can also stimulate how we—teachers, students, and researchers—come to write stories that are critical, persuasive, and creative. These stories can possibly lead us to embrace the multiple purposes served by writing. At the same time, they could help us to talk more openly about writing pedagogies, practices, processes, and politics.

This way of seeing, doing, and teaching writing implies the following:

1. Writing is expansive, for it not only happens in English classrooms, but across all classrooms and beyond to include local communities.
2. Collaborations between and among teachers must be encouraged and supported by school administrators for interdisciplinary, even multidisciplinary, approaches to guide innovative writing instruction. Such approaches on writing might enhance how students transfer knowledge and writing practices from one class to the next and into their out-of-school interactions.
3. Writing serves a crucial part in critical, transformative literacy work and, hence, should take a central role in how teachers and students transact with each other and with texts.
4. We need to address our resistances to teaching writ-

ing and our students' trepidations with doing writing. One way to do this is by teaching writing not as an arduous task whose only purpose is evaluative in nature, but as a practice in self-expression, argumentation, and engagement with real ideas and real people.

We can rely and expand on various frameworks to do this work, particularly those of cultural modeling (Lee) and culturally responsive instruction (Ladson-Billings). In this way, teachers across the curriculum can begin, however gradually, to move away from thinking that there is a standard way to teach writing that comes equipped with a standard means of assessing writing. We know this is not the case!

Our Challenge: Innovative Writing Instruction

Undoubtedly, teaching and researching on writing are challenging yet necessary components of the work of teachers, teacher educators, teacher researchers, and students across grade levels. Many who teach and/or focus on writing are faced with ongoing challenges: large class sizes, time restraints, heavy paper loads, standardized examinations, demands for explicit grammar instruction, and technological resources not readily available for classroom use or at one's school. Such challenges are present in the face of shifting school and community patterns, globalization, and attacks on public education, immigration, and ethnic studies across the nation. As I ponder these continued challenges, I end this last column by briefly reflecting on passages about writing from essays published here over the last three years. The selected passages and my reflections on them motivate me to innovate my curricular practices, pedagogical approaches, and research agenda. It also reawakens within me a sense of urgency to collaborate with other teachers and researchers to think differently and in multiple ways about innovative writing instruction and about the educational preparation and safeguarding of students. Doing so could speak volumes to how we commit or recommit ourselves to critical and transformative literacy teaching and research.

Selections from "Innovative Writing Instruction" Columns

Passage #1: "Writing in the Midst of Change" by Valerie Kinloch

> What do students think about writing? How can we listen to their stories as we make sense of the world in which we live? As I think about these questions, I recall Phillip and Khaleeq, two African American males who graduated from an urban high school in New York City's Harlem . . . we have been engaging in conversations (in person and via email) about language, community, and youth identity in an effort to consider writing as experiences people have with words in the world. (85)

As I reread this passage, I was drawn to this underlying idea: It is important to carefully and intently listen to students by paying attention to what they say and do not say, and what their words, attitudes, and dispositions reveal. The act of listening connects to the theme "writing as experiences people have with words in the world." While it sounds easy enough to think about writing in this way, I am aware that some teachers may either struggle with or resist this way of teaching writing when it comes to actual classroom instruction. This is especially so in light of large class sizes and the threat of increased test scores determining one's job performance. Situating writing in/as experiences with words in the world would require an acknowledgment of the various human stories that are brought into classrooms. Therefore, I wonder: Might a qualitative inquiry approach to literacy instruction enhance how we teach writing, how students do writing, and how we see writing (and literacy) as connected to community interactions, cultures, and ways of life?

I end this last column by briefly reflecting on passages about writing from essays published here over the last three years. The selected passages and my reflections on them motivate me to innovate my curricular practices, pedagogical approaches, and research agenda.

Passage #2: "Authentic Beliefs" by Simao Drew

> What impressed me were the innocence and honesty of the students' essays. Gone was the mechanistic style that marks a writer paying too close attention to sentence structure and teacher perception rather than thoughts and

> emotions. Gone was the affected vocabulary; also gone, for the most part, was the jaded persona that is so often the marked territory of the high school senior. (108)

As Drew asserts, if given an opportunity to engage in creative and critical writing, students can produce essays on a variety of challenging topics (e.g., family illnesses, fear, acceptance, and the struggles with becoming adults) while demonstrating sophisticated meaning-making processes. From questioning engagements within the world to responding to personal issues, Drew's students began to understand the power of writing about and grounding individual experiences in larger narratives on identity, community, and family. As Drew insists, "Gone . . . were general, unfocused statements" (108). Hence, I wonder: What strategies, methods, and practices do and can teachers use in their instruction to encourage students to connect the voluntary, or "personal" (e.g., set of experiences, personal voice), with the school-sponsored (e.g., academic writing, rhetorical stances)?

Passage #3: "Writing Selves, Writing Stories" by Valerie Kinloch, Audra Slocum, Mary Ressler, and Ryan Rish

> Acts of writing, for my three coauthors, occur in classrooms and cafés, while evaluating student writing, and during virtual and face-to-face meetings. Together, their perspectives, or writing stories, can inform our thinking about writing, challenge us to reconsider writing experiences that we individually author, and invite us to cherish the writing encounters we collaboratively create. (103)

I believe that the individual stories Audra, Mary, and Ryan shared contribute to a larger, ongoing conversation in English education related to how we can imagine, and hence teach, writing as transformative insofar as writing purposes and writing locations are concerned. Connected to this point is the idea that collaboration serves a significant role in professional and instructional work, from co-designing curriculum, writing assignments, and educational activities with colleagues to working together during professional development sessions. In fact, we encourage, even require, students to collaborate all the time: writing groups, literature circles, peer-feedback sessions, class debates, etc. I wonder: How can we be more explicit about collaborations, among colleagues and among students, in ways that affect how we teach and do writing?

Passage #4: "'Does my iMovie suck?': Assessing Teacher Candidates' Digital Composition Processes" by Jeanine Staples

> Student teachers and I explore how various media function in multiple contexts and in the lives of different individuals and groups across time and space. For instance, we have explored music as a medium and considered the ways lyrics and sound are used on contemporary radio, websites, and in personal technologies that are transportable (e.g., MP3s). During our explorations, we have examined how these things affect change within the reader/listener by introducing or expanding awareness about particular social, cultural, and/or linguistic experiences. (95)

When I think about innovation in writing instruction, there are many thoughts that come to mind related to creativity, student and teacher voice, multiple perspectives, mixed methods, diverse teaching and learning approaches, etc. Staples, for instance, pushes me to expand my understanding of innovation in that she turns attention to the value and role played by digital composing processes across contexts. Undoubtedly, people's increased involvement with media and media technologies points to how these tools and resources can affect student learning. In what ways, then, might media and students' interest in media technologies open up doors and provide an abundance of learning opportunities for teachers to innovate curricular approaches? How might we all come to better imagine the locations where and reasons why students write/engage in digital composing?

Writing as Across, Expansive, and Transformative: A Final Note

I hope that the "Innovative Writing Instruction" column has served as a forum for productively contentious yet critical discussions on approaches to writing instruction. One of my goals for this column was to present various voices and ideas by teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in an effort to think about writing from a critical, transformative literacy perspective. I hope that you have taken something from the columns published here and that you will continue to think and talk publicly about writing in var-

ious classrooms, schools, and communities of learning.

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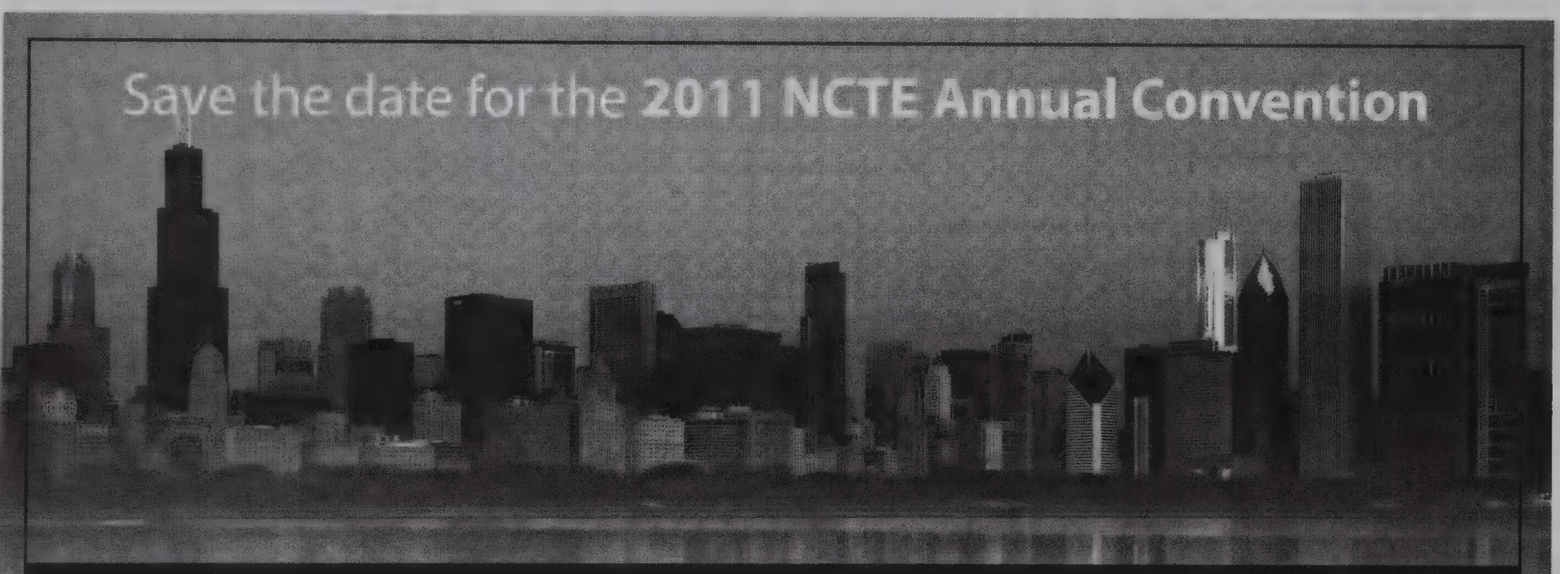

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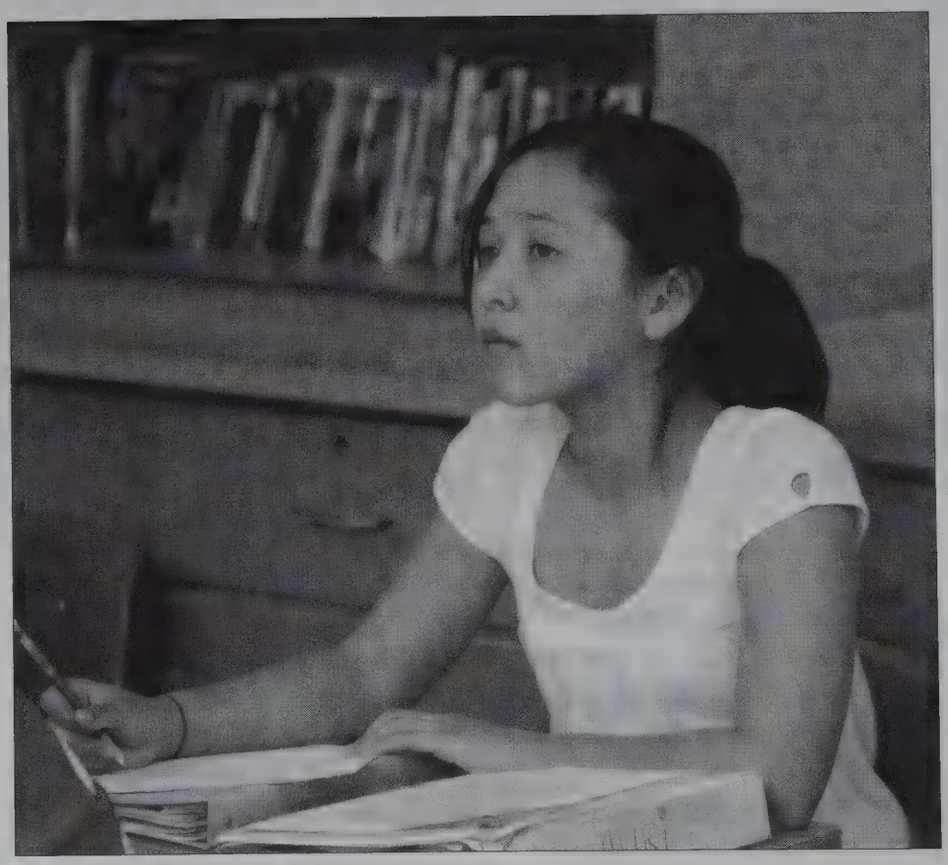
Mentoring Matters

Long ago, when I was a student teacher, an experienced teacher politely cautioned me against using the faculty washroom, assuming that I was a student. Even at that time, I thought that I looked somewhat older than the high school students, and I was wearing a tie, which should have distinguished me as an adult. The situation seems both improbable and laughable now, but at the time, it was one more challenge to my effort to form my identity as a bona fide teacher. We certainly cannot control for errors in perception; but when we recognize a student teacher or beginning teacher, we can take care not to emphasize and remark on the newcomer's youth and inexperience, as if these factors define entirely who the person is. Deborah Bieler cautions us about how the language we use with beginning teachers influences how they perceive themselves, and she advises us how the care we take with our interactions can foster a positive sense of identity as a viable member of a professional community.



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Valuing Inexperience: Using Collegial Language to Support Novices

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In June 2006, I was five months pregnant with twins. In one of my last outings before being confined to bed rest, I visited a local department store, where my belly's size evoked a number of memorable responses. One gentleman to whom I said, "Excuse me, sir, can you help me?" was so befuddled when he saw me that he started backing away; this was before he realized that I was not asking him to deliver my babies right there in the Storage Solutions aisle but merely asking him to reach something on the bottom shelf for me. He apologized for his initial response and then left me with this comment: "Your life is just about to change forever. It will never, ever be the same."

Later, in the infant clothing section, a mother whose little girl was swinging her legs from the shopping cart seat asked me when I was due. "October," I said, bracing myself for the predictable gasp that followed. "Oh my," she responded ruefully. "You look like

you're ready to give birth any second!" As she rolled her cart away, she added, "Just remember: It gets easier." As I pondered this idea, I approached the cashier, who also turned out to be a mother. She took one long look at me and the two-of-a-kind items I was purchasing and slowly shook her head, frowning. She simply advised, "Get all the sleep you can now, honey." As I drove home, I wondered how any of these comments was even remotely helpful. I wondered, too, how they managed to fill me with powerful feelings of dread when they had been spoken by seemingly supportive strangers. In fact, these comments got under my skin so much that I wrote them down in an effort to remind myself never to repeat them to parents-to-be.

As student teachers and new teachers enter the rich, historied culture of their English departments, they are listening and looking intently for cues about how they fit in. Sadly, recent scholarship indicates that many teachers never actually find a satisfactory fit.

Interestingly, though, in the intervening years since that shopping trip, I have been reminded of it frequently—not by parents, but rather by the student teachers and new teachers with whom I work. These beginning teachers have told me story after story about comments their colleagues make, and they sure ring a bell. It turns out that pregnant women and student teachers receive similar comments from their more-experienced peers. In this brief column, I examine some of these similarities and encourage all of us who consider ourselves experienced to take seriously the opportunities we have through our daily use of language to create friendly and encouraging transitions for the less-experienced members of our communities, whether teachers or parents.

The Language of New-ness

Many scholars, such as Lisa Delpit (Delpit and Dowdy) and James Paul Gee (Gee, Allen, and Clinton), have written compellingly about the interrelationship between language and identity, particularly about how a person's identity shapes and is shaped by language. One thing that is so fear-inducing to newcomers is the high degree of uncertainty they experience with regard to language and identity. In new settings, it often isn't immediately clear, for example, how language is used by different members of the community and to what extent newcomers' language use is expected to conform. As student teachers and new teachers enter the rich, historied culture of their English departments, they are listening and looking intently for cues about how they fit in. Sadly, recent scholarship indicates that many teachers never actually find a satisfactory fit. According to Richard Ingersoll, almost 50% of new teachers quit before they reach their sixth year of teaching. Susan M. Kardos and Susan Moore Johnson explain that this severe attrition may be due to the fact that new teachers often experience their school culture as both unsupportive of newcomers and lacking a sense of collective responsibility. Given these troubling reports, an examination of our language with newcomers becomes particularly important.

Looking Beyond the Physical

Many of the unsettling comments that student teachers and pregnant women receive are related to their physical appearance. While pregnant women are often literally and figuratively uncomfortable in their skin and have a heightened awareness of their appearance because it is so different from what is normal for them, student teachers experience an increased physical self-consciousness as well. I recall a mid-autumn meeting of NETS (New English Teachers for Social Justice)[1] during which several first-year teachers complained about the numerous comments colleagues made about their youthful appearance. One of the new teachers told a story about how, when she arrived at a local community college event to speak about her experience as a new teacher, one of the district administrators greeted her by saying, "Oh, you must be the new teacher; you look really young!" After her story elicited a number of similar stories at the NETS meeting, this first-year teacher commented, "I can't take the looking young. Do they think that's something we want to hear? It's embarrassing."

Other NETS teachers described their disappointment when experienced peers responded to them as if their appearance belied their intellect. One teacher explained, "In my department, I've gotten a lot of compliments from teachers,

but I almost wonder if it's because initially, when they saw me, they [assumed that I was immature]. They were surprised that I was so mature, that I'm, quote, an old teacher in a new teacher's body." A third NETS teacher responded, "You wonder what they thought you were going to come in and do, like have a keg party in the lounge?" Although the physical appearance of novice teachers or pregnant women is sometimes the aspect of their identities that is most immediately apparent and therefore tempting to discuss, it is important to go beyond the physical and focus conversation, instead, on more salient issues.

Focusing on Questions, Ideas, and Goals

What comprises those "more salient" issues is not for experienced peers to determine. Instead, I'd contend, it is for the new teachers—or new parents—to establish. Experienced colleagues should approach their interactions with beginners with the assumption that the beginners have numerous and compelling ideas and goals. Despite their recent arrival to the community, most newcomers bring with them a long history of thoughts and questions about their new endeavor. Student teachers, for example, often feel that they are treated as if they are not yet "real" teachers, just as pregnant women often feel that they are treated as if they are not yet "real" mothers. Members of these populations, however, have already made many subtle yet significant identity shifts as part of the process of *becoming*; they have already begun to think like teachers, like mothers; their priorities and even their worldviews have begun to change.

When they interact with new colleagues, experienced teachers should consider how they can follow promising educational practices—not that they ought to treat novices like students, but that they can apply research-based recommendations as they engage newcomers in dialogue. For example, educators might be guided by Katherine Schultz's recommendation that "[i]t is only by engaging students in posing questions and critique—imagining the possible—that we educate students to participate in our pluralistic democracy" (2). It is encouraging to imagine how new teachers' practice and retention rates might be improved if their experienced colleagues took Schultz's counsel as a starting point in their interactions with their less-experienced peers.

Student teachers often feel that they are treated as if they are not yet "real" teachers, just as pregnant women often feel that they are treated as if they are not yet "real" mothers.

Promoting Empathy

Linda Christensen argues that "[e]mpathy is the key to community building" (6), suggesting a novel approach to supporting new teachers, an approach that involves neither professional development seminars nor guest speakers. For novices, demonstrations of empathy toward experienced colleagues might involve seeking to understand the rationale behind their practices or beliefs, for example, or how their experiences and their philosophies have influenced one another. Novices should also be aware that their presence is likely to ignite experienced teachers' memories and elicit stories about these memories. Just as pregnant women are subjected to other mothers' labor stories, new teachers are also unwitting audiences for other teachers' first-year stories. These include stories about being mistaken for a student and being asked for a hall pass, not having a classroom of one's own, and even being asked to the prom. When novices can respond to these stories with compassion rather than frustration, they have made an important step toward collegiality. Similarly, when experienced teachers can keep in check the impulse to narrate their own histories and, instead, inquire about novices' interests, questions, ideas, and goals, they, too, have made important strides toward establishing the kind of professional culture that Kardos and Johnson have promoted.

Preparing for Labor

Now that my twins are toddlers, my memory of how it felt to be pregnant is a bit less vivid with each passing year. So, too, are my memories of what it was like to be a student teacher, now that I'm a teacher educator. This is not to say that I don't remember what either was like: I do. I remember specific moments, conversations, names, faces, places, and emotions. In fact, one of the reasons I became a teacher educator is because memories of my own difficult student-teaching

experience compelled me to work toward improving teacher preparation for future generations of English teachers. Because we all are shaped by our early experiences, we must commit to working together to ensure that novice teachers' early experiences in the profession are filled with language that is as supportive as possible.

Note

1. NETS (New English Teachers for Social Justice) is an action research group founded and facilitated by Deborah Bieler.

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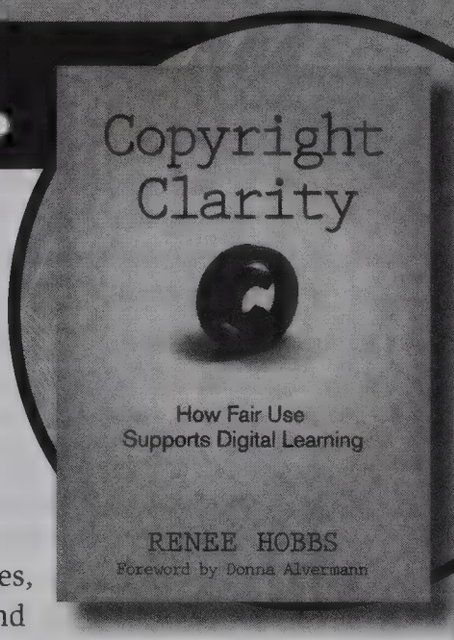

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Research for the Classroom

Graphic Novels in the Classroom: Curriculum Design, Implementation, and Reflection

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I will tell you something my students do not know: I read my first graphic novel only three months before deciding to teach it. It felt like a risky move, but the results far exceeded my expectations.

I was planning to teach Writing 100—English Skills, the course prior to the mandated first-year writing class. Students were required to take English Skills for a variety of reasons; the class consisted of students with a combination of characteristics that included low (or no) SAT scores, having had an individualized education plan (IEP) in high school, dyslexia, low-level writing ability, English language learners, and international students. Most did not want to read or write and some were bitter about being in the class at all.

Fortunately, to better understand the reading backgrounds and trends of traditional incoming college students, I had recently completed an endorsement in Children's and Young Adult Literature. When I read my first graphic novel, I realized I had found my hook.

In a questionnaire I administered asking about their experiences with reading in school, students revealed varied reading backgrounds and a desire to choose what they read. In addition, student complaints about their lack of engagement with course texts served as the basis for my experiment: Could graphic novels increase students' interest in reading?

I wanted to introduce students to a relatively new genre and allow them to evaluate it in the context of how they had been taught in the past. To accomplish these goals, I created an assignment about graphic novels and literacy that guided students through four short papers, forming a longer research paper for the final project. They would begin with a narrative essay about reading; move to a compare-and-contrast essay (between a classic and graphic novel adaptation); then write an opinion essay about literacy, the disposition to read, and graphic novels; and end with a problem-and-solution essay that incorporated components of the opinion essay.

> **Could graphic novels increase students' interest in reading?**

The Narrative Essay

The first essay, the narrative, was about a time when the students had been encouraged to read or discouraged from reading. Students had no difficulty writing about this topic. While they worked on this paper I assigned their first graphic novel: *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan.

The Arrival is an award-winning wordless graphic novel about a man who leaves his family to create a new life in a foreign land. I knew it was engaging, but I had not anticipated its profound impact on the Chinese exchange students. In one group discussion, a student explained how the protagonist's experiences paralleled his own. Like the nameless man, he was in a new country and did not understand the culture, language, and food. Suddenly, other students asked him about what it was like studying so far from his family and in another language. This cross-cultural experience helped the students better understand Tan's depiction of immigration.

Next, students were to choose one graphic novel from three well-

known possibilities: Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese,* Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale,* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis.* I wanted them to have read a few graphic novels to form a better understanding of the genre, so I chose these options based on quality and multicultural representations. The students liked being able to choose which book they read and spent time in small groups discussing them. From their lively in-class discussions, it was clear that most of them were enjoying graphic novels.

The Compare-and-Contrast Essay

The second essay, compare-and-contrast, involved reading a classic text and then a graphic novel adaptation of it (see fig. 1 for guidelines for creating an assignment). I provided options that varied in terms of the gender of the protagonist as well as the reading level: *Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Jane Eyre, A Christmas Carol, Frankenstein,* and *Treasure Island.* From these six books, students selected their top three and I placed them in reading groups that focused on one classic from their list of choices.

Students considered the strengths and weaknesses of each version and then, using evidence from the text, recommended one version. About half of the students recommended reading the classic and half recommended the graphic novel. Students who preferred the classic pointed out ideas and concepts previously learned in English classes, while the other half argued that some graphic novels had everything the classic had and were shorter. In this paper, I focused on framing quotations, paraphrasing, in-text citations, and bibliographic references.

Building on this foundation, a librarian and I taught research skills, distinctions between primary and secondary sources, and the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. With our assistance, students located and read articles about graphic novels and literacy in preparation for their next essay.

By this point, they had read four books. Some students said they had never read so many books in a semester! The graphic novels also reduced the reading load for the English language learners because the images provided context and clues.

FIGURE 1. Compare-and-Contrast Essay Guidelines

Objectives:

- Infer information from text and visuals
- Find and demonstrate themes and literary devices
- Compare and contrast information from multiple sources and mediums
- Formulate original ideas and clearly articulate them using evidence from texts

Materials:

- Classic literature option(s) required or suggested by state standards
- A graphic novel adaptation* of classic(s)

Procedure:

1. Create essay standards and requirements (page length, MLA style, quotation guidelines). Here are a few questions students could consider for the paper:
   - Is the graphic novel adaptation a good representation of the classic? Why or why not?
   - What are the strengths and weaknesses of each book?
   - Which would they recommend to a modern reader and why?
   - Why is the original a classic? What does the graphic novel add or lack in comparison?
2. Establish which classic(s) to use and divide students into reading groups.
3. Three reading options:

   (1) Read entire classic and then the adaptation.
   (2) Read part of the classic, then the corresponding part of the adaptation.
   (3) Read adaptation and then the classic.
4. Students begin reading. Providing them with a handout guiding them to look for similarities and differences helps them prepare for the paper.
5. When both books have been read, move students into brainstorming for the essay.

*These adaptations are rapidly becoming a subgenre of graphic novels. I strongly recommend the publisher Classical Comics. Most of their adaptations have multiple text options. There is original text, which uses the author's words directly; plain text, which translates it into modern English; and quick text, which contains fewer words but keeps the original plot for a faster pace that is great for reluctant readers.

The Opinion Essay

For their opinion essay, the third piece, students developed an argument addressing this two-fold question: How do teachers increase literacy and make students interested in it? They could research more about graphic novels or develop an original plan. Many chose graphic novels, but some researched new teaching methods, such as programs that build connections between high schools and colleges.

I told them that, regardless of their argument, their papers should be interesting and relevant to what they wanted to study in college. From here, students took different paths. Some examined literacy practices through art, others through elementary education. Still others chose to look at the different types of students who may not be reached with traditional teaching methods such as reluctant readers, visual learners, and ESL students. The research requirement included at least five sources, one of which was primary. As part of their composition process, students wrote an annotated bibliography—another essential component of college research for other courses.

The Problem-and-Solution Essay

The fourth paper was a problem-and-solution essay, which required students to develop an implementation plan for their opinion argument. Using the main points from the opinion paper, they provided examples of books, graphic novels, lesson plans, etc. that would work toward the goals of enhanced literacy skills and student interest. To get them started, I supplied bags of graphic novels, some from my own collection and some from the library.

Then something unexpected happened. Students started asking to borrow the graphic novels. I pointed out that some of the graphic novels were not good examples for their arguments, but several students explained that they did not intend to use the graphic novel for the paper; they just wanted to read it because it looked cool.

My students—students who were supposed to be nonreaders and who had defined themselves as reluctant readers (after they learned the term)—*wanted* to read books, for fun. I encouraged them to borrow the books and listened when they returned them and offered recommendations and critiques to their peers.

For their final exam, students turned in a portfolio. They had revised and combined all of their papers into one essay, adding transitions and an overall conclusion. They started with a story about their own reading experience, showed a case study of a classic and its graphic novel adaptation, then argued about whether it was a viable form of increasing literacy and interest, and ended with an implementation plan and conclusion. Some even included a graphic representation of their narrative, blending the visual element into their final paper.

I had expected the papers to be ten to twelve pages of text, but most were closer to 15 pages. They included ten sources, nine recommended graphic novels or books, and an annotated bibliography in MLA style with one-inch margins. Including the supporting material, the papers were almost 20 pages long. This was from a class whose members, in the first weeks of school, had said they had never written anything more than six or seven pages, ever. When I asked them to take out their papers and hold them in their hands, they were surprised at the weight. One student complained that hers was so thick the stapler could not penetrate it. I reminded them that all of that writing was theirs, that they had written every word. Many students had been afraid of the research papers they would have in college. We spent time talking about how they could use the skills they learned from this process and apply them to those future assignments.

Including the supporting material, the papers were almost 20 pages long. This was from a class whose members, in the first weeks of school, had said they had never written anything more than six or seven pages, ever.

The final writing piece was a two-page letter to a future Writing 100 student. Students explained how their self-images had transformed: they had thought of themselves as bad readers, but reading something interesting made it easier, more relaxing, and fun. They wrote that by reading a variety of graphic novels, they had come to love them. The most surprising result came from one of my adult returning students.

She had been studying the effects of graphic novels for her paper and, after her son lost inter-

est in books, she decided to give him a graphic novel. It reignited his love of reading; as a result of her suggestion, her son's teacher will include graphic novels in his classroom, too.

By researching graphic novels, I have learned that, as a teacher, I must remain teachable. It is important that I am as open to new ideas as I ask my students to be. I must keep seeking approaches that inspire and teach them, and I've found that choice is essential. If students have choices and can explore topics in ways that are interesting or relevant to them, they take more initiative in their learning. Giving students the opportunity to reflect, evaluate, and decide how literacy has influenced them especially helped the reluctant readers reconsider their perceptions about their education. These students became aware of the tensions between literacy, interest, and standards, and they better understood the reading selections in their previous schools. Like many English teachers, my goal for my students is not that they will just pass my class, but that they will be lifelong readers and writers who are *literate* in every sense of that word. For that to happen they first have to be interested in reading, and graphic novels can be the hook to draw them in.

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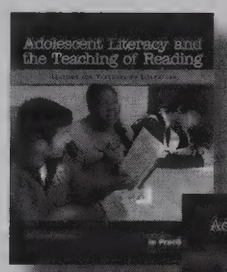

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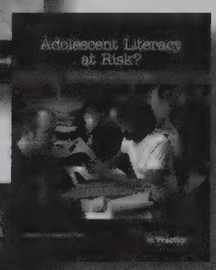

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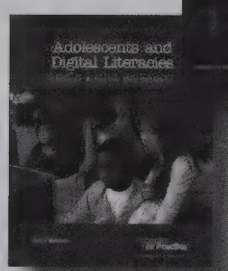

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Success with ELLs

Supporting ELLs Before, During, and After Reading

Working with English language learners in mainstream ELA classrooms can provide rich rewards in terms of developing multiple perspectives, sharing diverse experiences, and developing understanding of different cultural practices. However, these students can also challenge mainstream teachers. Supporting ELLs throughout the reading process can enhance outcomes for those students in terms of comprehension and in terms of a greater sense of self-efficacy as readers. In addition, successful support can increase teacher effectiveness and actually make the classroom teacher's job less challenging, at least in this one area.

Strategic Reading + Self-Efficacy = Success

Strategic reading refers to contexts where readers actively construct meaning while reading and interacting with the text. Proficient readers use their background knowledge and textual clues to create meaning. Research on reading provides evidence for the fact that reading strategies are critical to successful reading (Baker and Brown) and that "effective readers are strategic readers who are able to apply various strategies while reading in order to enhance their comprehension" (Davis-Lenski, Wham, and John 133). They have a purpose for reading and they utilize skills as they construct meaning (Paris, Wasik, and Turner). When students are aware of strategies and use them automatically, they have become independent readers. Strategies are not naturally acquired. Students become aware of and engage in specific strategies through explicit instruction. Readers require support throughout the reading process, and teachers who understand this and provide these literacy scaffolds can move their students more steadily along the continuum of reading and literacy development.

> **A person's beliefs about his or her ability to be successful with a text will affect how he or she approaches the task of reading and learning to read.**

Self-efficacy refers to a person's beliefs in his or her capabilities. "Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act" (Bandura 71). A person's beliefs about his or her ability to be successful with a text will affect how he or she approaches the task of reading and learning to read. Many older struggling readers blame themselves for their inability to read or read effectively, and this creates a cycle of avoidance, refusal to engage in the reading process, and viewing future attempts at reading as hopeless (Wallace). Students who hold the belief that they are ineffective as readers and avoid reading are challenging to educators who are trying to build skills in high school level English language learners whose reading comprehension skills in English may be lower than their comprehension in their native language and lower than that of their grade-level peers.

What's Explicit about Explicit Instruction?

Explicit strategy instruction can be thought of as activities that teachers employ to make students aware of the processes that they are engaging in to make meaning from text and to communicate effectively, either in written or oral form. When teachers engage in explicit strategies instruction they purposefully aim to increase not only comprehension but also the metacognitive understanding of what strategies can be used and how and when to select different strategies, based on the task at hand. At the secondary level we

often assume that students are in command of specific strategies for specific tasks. However, students at this level frequently do not actively engage in strategic reading, planning, and studying. ELLs especially may be so overwhelmed with comprehension that they either forget to apply strategies or are unable to transfer strategies from one context to another. Students who have been explicitly taught strategies and have had the opportunity to engage in applied and guided practice ultimately have tools at their disposal that can serve them when most needed.

Building Strategies in Practice

As a secondary ELA/ESL teacher, I was always working to find ways to make the curriculum accessible to English language learners and to work with mainstream teachers so that the ESL classroom activities supported and enhanced the learning that was taking place in the content classroom. The students I taught were enrolled in an alternative high school program and many were considered to be students with interrupted formal education (SIFE). They faced a number of challenges with reading, comprehension, and completing the activities that were part of the unit plans. I scaffolded lessons in many ways, including using bilingual materials when available and providing audiobooks of the classroom texts when available. However, this was not enough. After working with these students and determining their needs, I developed a lesson sequence that combined a series of reading strategies with the objectives of building comprehension abilities, vocabulary, language skills, and self-efficacy as readers.

When teachers select strategies to teach explicitly, they must consider a number of factors. Who are the students and what are their learning styles? What are their past experiences with learning and the task at hand? What is manageable in the existing classroom context? There are hundreds of possible strategies to choose from, and teachers must make informed instructional decisions based on their own comfort level, their experience and expertise, and their context. Using a strategy that is challenging to implement because of contextual factors will not result in a great deal of success and may frustrate both teacher and students. For example, a guided imagery strategy, which requires a quiet setting for concentration, can fail if the classroom location has multiple distractions (noise or other interruptions) and therefore might not be the best strategy to implement in that particular setting.

My strategies had to meet a number of goals. First, they had to be easy to implement (no special materials needed) and transferable across the contexts of different genres, different topics, and the different levels of proficiency and preparation of my students. Second, they had to become a regular part of the classroom routine. While these were not the only strategies ever used, they formed a core so that students would understand what was expected of them and be able to *get right to work* after becoming familiar with these strategies. In other words, after introduction, guided, and applied practice, students needed to employ these strategies independently so that they were responsible for their own learning. Finally, these strategies had to engage and motivate students. After experimenting with a number of different strategies, I decided on the following:

- *Anticipation Guides* as a prereading scaffold
- *Vocabulary Self-Selection* (VSS) to facilitate meaningful vocabulary development (Haggard), followed by a *Vocabulary Squares* activity to help the students solidify the vocabulary through strong personal connections
- *Directed Reading-Thinking Activity* (DR-TA), a during-reading scaffold, and guided discussion and strategy (Stauffer)
- A *GIST* activity, an after-reading scaffold and writing prompt (Cunningham)

I selected these activities based on their research-based success with other populations, the ability to adapt them to a variety of activities, and the learner-centered nature of the tasks. Prior to working with these strategies, I would introduce the strategy outside any context. My belief was that these students were developing young adults and would be better served if they had an understanding of why we were doing what we were doing. We engaged in classroom discussion about what was "hard" about reading and how these students viewed themselves as readers. In the beginning of the school year, when participating in their initial student-teacher conference and asked about what makes a good reader, students responded

that good readers were born that way, or good readers were rich and had good jobs.

For example, one student, Jose, an 18-year-old from Central America, answered the question *What makes a good reader in English?* "I think they born that way, Miss." Another student reported his frustration with classroom practice: "Everything is hard, Miss. When I look at words in a book I get mad. My teacher try to make me read but I no do it. I pretend." And finally, and perhaps most telling, was an 18-year-old student from Ecuador who responded to the good reader question by telling me, "It make you a good reader if you rich and have good job." In other words, there was a strong feeling among my students that they were not good readers, and that there were some qualitative characteristics that good readers possessed, but they were beyond the reach of my students for a number of reasons. By talking about how successful readers were no different from them except that successful readers knew about and used strategies, my students began to buy into the idea that they too could develop these skills.

We first worked with these skills using short readings, such as newspaper articles, and I modeled all strategies by speaking my thoughts out loud as I read the article (a *think-aloud* protocol; see the Center for Applied Linguistics: http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0314lavandez.html). Hearing my thoughts explicitly stated, the students understood my task as a reader, what my thought process in completing the reading task was, and how my thought process assisted my reading comprehension. Once the students understood the directions and were able to use the particular strategy, we were then ready to pull it all together and apply it to other texts.

A typical reading task was approached in the following way. The class would work on completing an anticipation guide that required students to make predictions or display their prior knowledge about a particular topic that the section of the text we were working on dealt with (see an example at http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/guided-comprehension-previewing-using-226.html?tab=1#tabs). The anticipation guide can be developed so that it targets before-, during-, and after-reading segments of the lesson. Before reading it serves as a way to call up prior knowledge and connect it to the reading or activities to come. As a during-reading scaffold it can help students develop a purpose for reading by asking them to think about certain questions, themes, and issues that are important in the reading. Finally, as an after-reading strategy, teachers can direct students to revisit their initial responses and revise based on the information obtained from the reading as well as reflect on what conceptions and perceptions were validated and what changed as a result of their reading. In my classroom the anticipation guide was completed as a teacher-guided whole-group activity and also facilitated rich discussions about the text and the themes that we identified.

By talking about how successful readers were no different from them except that successful readers knew about and used strategies, my students began to buy into the idea that they too could develop these skills.

During reading, the DR-TA was used (see an example at http://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/drta), which is a comprehension strategy that promotes critical awareness and thinking. This activity requires students to engage in prediction, verification, interpretation, and judgment (Vacca and Vacca 136). After the reading and DR-TA, participants engaged in a VSS, which facilitates the acquisition of academic vocabulary (see an example at http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/choosing-chatting-collecting-vocabulary-296.html). Students nominate a word that they would like to learn more about, from the reading, and then they work in groups to discuss, define, and tell why the word is important enough to have been nominated. The groups share with the whole class and "teach" the selected words to their peers. After the VSS, students also developed vocabulary squares, a verbal-visual word association strategy. Verbal-visual word association strategies help students move beyond memorization of words and toward development of rich and personal associations (Eeds and Cockrum; Readence, Bean, and Baldwin). In the vocabulary square activity, the teacher develops templates for students. Essentially, a page is divided into four quadrants, and each square provides space for an aspect of the

FIGURE 1. Blank Vocabulary Square

Word	Use it in a sentence
Antonyms	Definition

FIGURE 2. Completed Vocabulary Square

Word	Use it in a sentence
Perturbed	*I become perturbed when I think about the war in Afghanistan.*
Antonyms	Definition
Calm, soothed, reassured	*to disturb greatly in mind*

word (see fig. 1). See Figure 2 for a completed vocabulary square.

Modifications to this activity are almost endless. A picture can be drawn in one of the squares, as well as the word in the students' native language, so they are building a bilingual dictionary. Another option is to have students write the definition in their own words (as opposed to the dictionary definition) or to write a sentence from the text where the word appears in context.

Once the DR-TA and vocabulary strategies were completed for a given segment of the reading, we engaged in guided, reflective discussion to further develop the concepts from the reading, to clear up any misconceptions, and to help students understand the reading, and at this point the anticipation guide was revisited. The final activity was a GIST activity where students answer who, what, where, when, why, and how, then write a 15–20 word summary of what they have read. (An example of a GIST activity and lesson can be found at http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/gist-summarizing-strategy-content-290.html.) Not only did this strategy help my students get the "gist" of the reading segment, it served as a low-stakes writing activity and helped them become more confident and fluent writers as the year progressed.

Effects on Student Learning

Using the aforementioned strategies together can form a powerful lesson sequence for helping ELLs comprehend the often complicated text they are required to read in mainstream, secondary English classes. By combining these strategies, ELLs—and all students—are supported before, during, and after reading and the set of strategies becomes manageable and transferable to other texts and other contexts.

Perhaps the most important effect is building students' self-efficacy as readers. When my students worked in this framework they surprised themselves at how engaged they actually became in the reading and how much they were able to comprehend and accomplish on their own. At the beginning of the school year they understood that there were good readers in the world, but they did not believe they were among them. After explicit discussion of strategies, explicit strategies instruction, and guided and applied practice, these students ended the school year with a sense of self-efficacy as readers and experienced success with text that would help them be successful in the future as they moved on from my classroom. The value of such instruction can be summed up with the words of Jose, the 18-year-old student from El Salvador, who, when responding to the question *What kind of a reader are you in English?* at the end of the school year, stated, "A good reader, Miss. Now I'm a good reader." EJ

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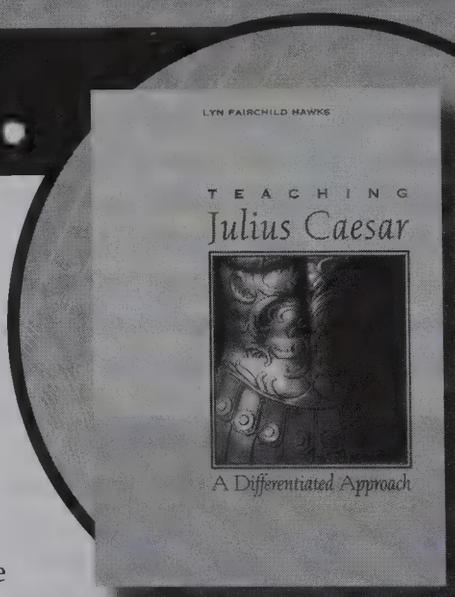

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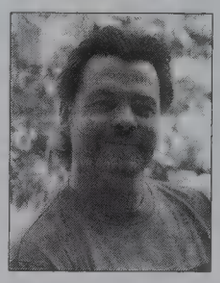
con·cis·if·y (kən-sīs-əf-ī): *v.* To make concise.



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Submission Friday—a mid-December morning and final drafts are due. My Senior AP Literature and Composition students had struggled through *Hamlet* and were finally about to submit their completed papers. They scrambled around the classroom, gathering the pieces of their submissions, asking me if they could please use my stapler because their little sister had used the last staple in the house to submit her paper on birds for sixth-grade science class. Now the ball was in my court. One hundred and three papers to grade before the holiday break.

I slogged through those papers at a pace of eight per day, calculating that I could return them on December 23—a holiday gift for all of us. As I pressed on, my commentary lacked the elegance I was accustomed to. I found myself writing, "Where do you get this?" and "What are you trying to say?" Among the "Why?"s and "Good point!"s I noticed that I wrote "use fewer words" and "pare down" and "get to the point" in many margins.

With a flush of life one morning as the stresses of holiday shopping loomed, I was at my desk at 4:30 and in the spirit of Gertrude, I wrote: "More matter with less art" (2.2.96). I wanted the student to be concise. On subsequent papers, I wrote variations of Gertrude's line combined with "make this concise" or "be concise." Realizing my use of the verb "to be" didn't set the best example, I went to the dictionary to find the verb form of "concise." I thought, *If I want the student to use fewer words, I have to use more words than should be necessary.* If I wanted my students to explain themselves, I might ask them to "elaborate," or "clarify," or even "illustrate," but I couldn't think of a verb to say "make this concise," so I went to my beaten and battered copy of the *American Heritage Dictionary.*

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Surprisingly, I found no verb form for *concise.* I looked at the synonyms and found *brief, succinct,* and *terse*—three adjectives that didn't have verb forms either. I tried to create some, but *briefen* didn't seem to make sense and it certainly didn't sound graceful. Neither did *succincten* or *succinctify.* I guess you could make an argument for *tersen,* but terse writing rubs me the wrong way. It's uninviting. It's brash and harsh.

I *did* find the verb *condense,* but that didn't seem to do the job either. When you condense something, often some of the good stuff is eliminated to ensure the structural materials have a place. You have to add water to bring condensed soup to life. Concise soup would be delicious right out of the can. Good writing *is* "dense," I guess you could say, but concise writing keeps *all* the pertinent information while leaving out extra verbiage. I was thinking of this in terms of a multiple-choice test. Yes, *condense* might be the best word among the choices given, but there should be a better answer.

As English teachers, we focus on students' use of active verbs. We frown on "to be" verbs and guffaw at a passive "he had launched the rocket." Yet there is no active verb for *concise.* You can have an "act of concision," which would make things shorter—end sooner. For instance, a fire drill is

an act of concision on the administration's part to end a class period. But you wouldn't want to write "this paragraph needs an act of concision" in the margin of a student's paper. Beside the fact that it's wordy, it sounds too *biblical.* You could also ask a student for "more conciseness," but again, too many words. A request might be made to "write this more concisely," but that would take four words in this terse manner and five if you were to add a polite "Please." And you would *have* to be terse or polite, because simply writing "concisely" wouldn't make sense. Now that I think about it, why do we have an adverb for *concise,* but no verb?

When I got to school that day, I brought my conundrum to my students, asking them to come up with a verb for this problem. After all, William Shakespeare made up words to suit his needs, so why shouldn't we? Walt suggested *concisify.*

Sure, why not?

Concisify.

It makes sense. And it comes readily conjugated. My students can say that they "concisified" their writing. They can also tell me that they didn't think their writing was any more "concisifiable" than it already was. If I ask them what they are doing during writing workshop, they can tell me that they are "concisifying" their paragraphs.

Concisify is truly an English teacher's word. As I finish writing this essay, I see that the only red squiggly lines below words in my draft are under the verb forms of *concisify. You* can't see it, but there it is again. Using this word for the last three years, I've noticed that after the first few weeks of school, my students stop using air quotes when we work on the concisification of our writing. And when people no longer need air quotes around new words, a real, live, useful, and important word is born.

The 2010 *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* "Word of the Year" is *austerity,* which means "enforced or extreme economy." While this fits our current national economic landscape, it is also fitting in the context of concisify. This year, I hope that "concisify" gets the nod, so that I no longer have to see that red, squiggly line beneath it.

Richard A. Mitchell Jr. teaches Senior Advanced Placement English and Academic Literature in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He also directs his school's theater program, East Theatre Company, and sponsors the artistic expressions magazine, *The Light from the East.* He enjoys spending time with his wife Maggie and their daughter Evelyn Rae.

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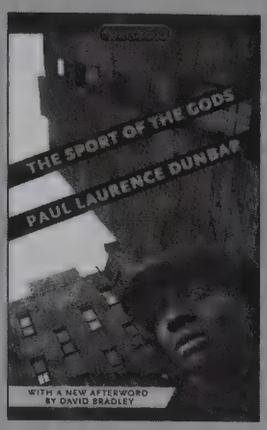

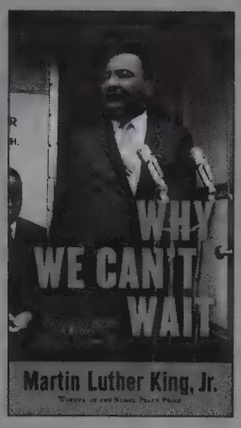

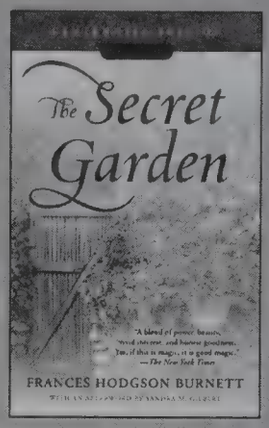

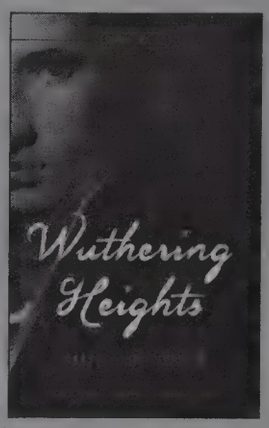

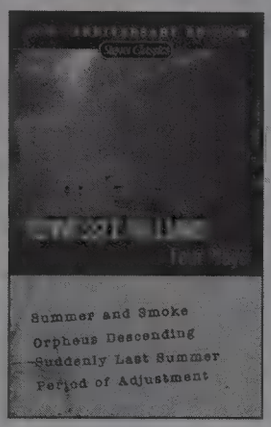

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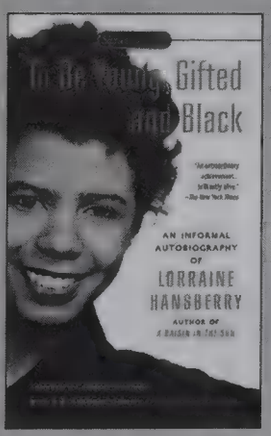

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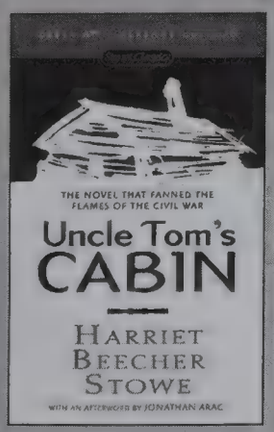

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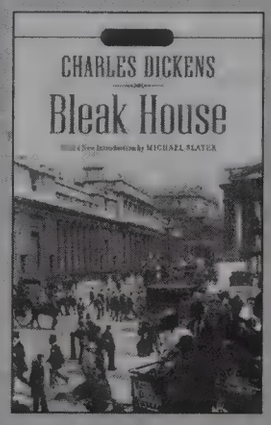

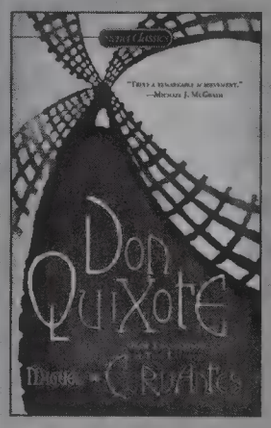

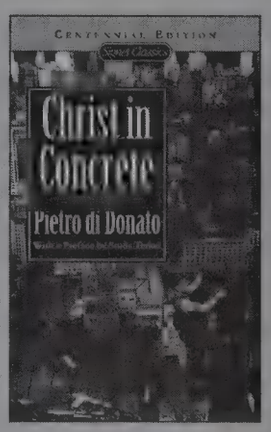

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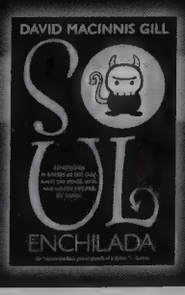

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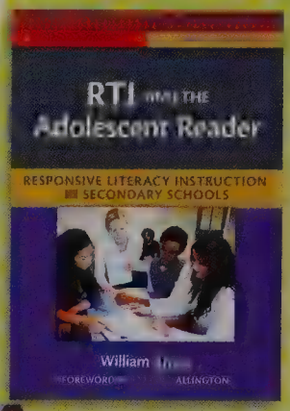

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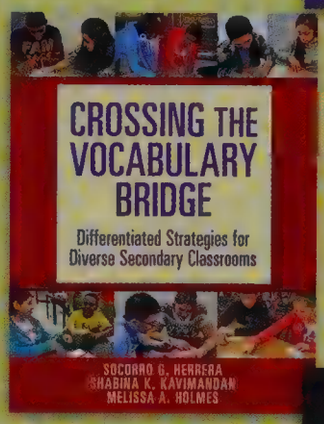

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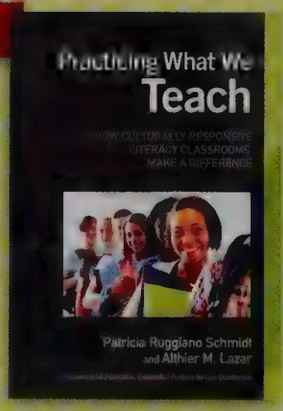

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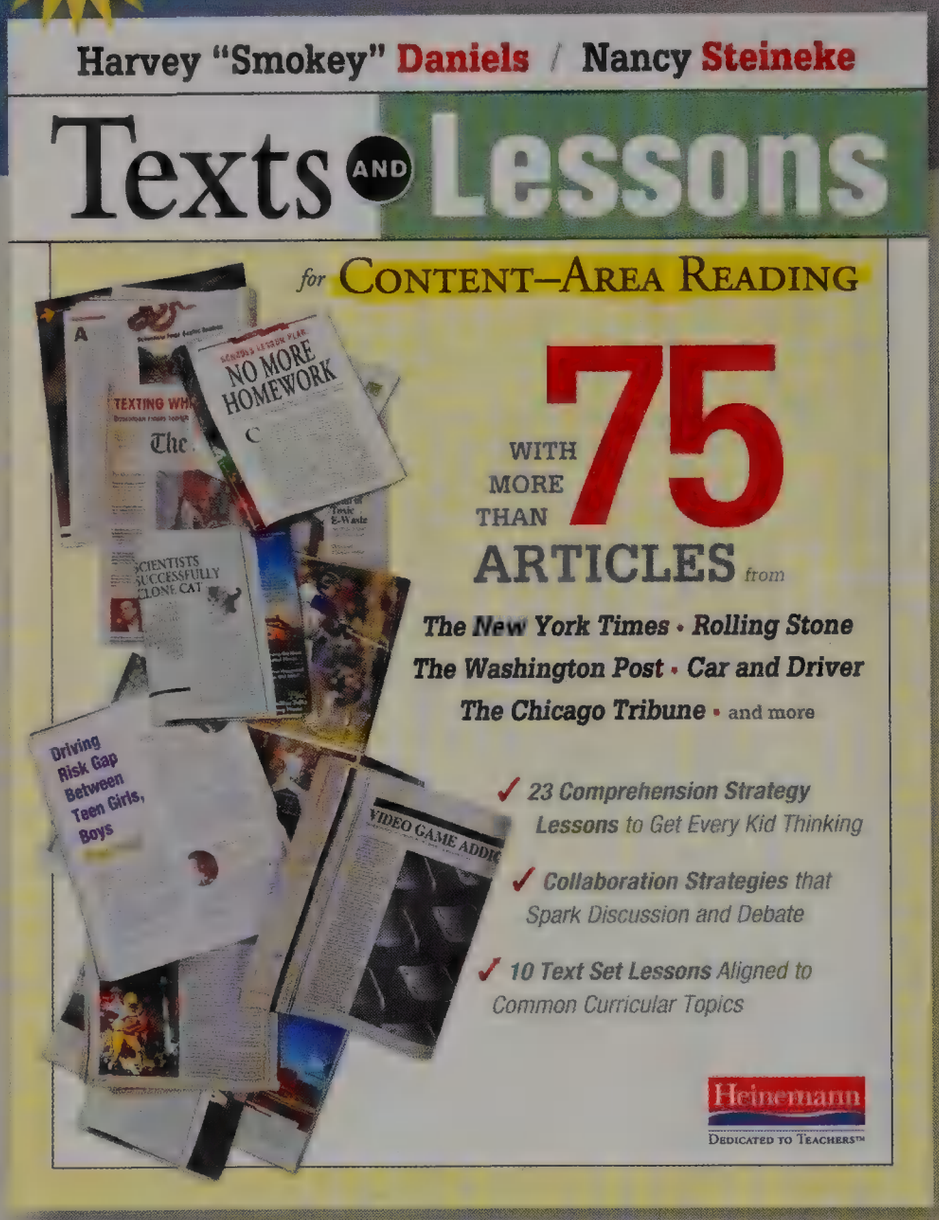

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Ethics in the English Classroom

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Jacqueline N. Glasgow and Allison L. Baer's and Kyle Vaughn's **Students Read about the Costs of War**

Trudi J. Nelson on **Grading Group Work**

Plagiarism and Technology
Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Kelly Sassi; Nancy Guillot Pearson

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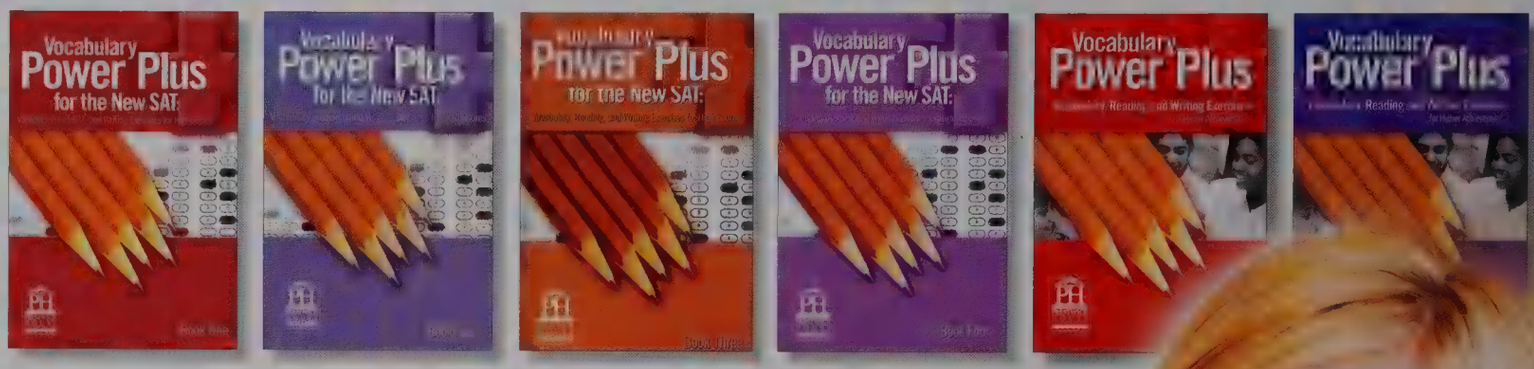

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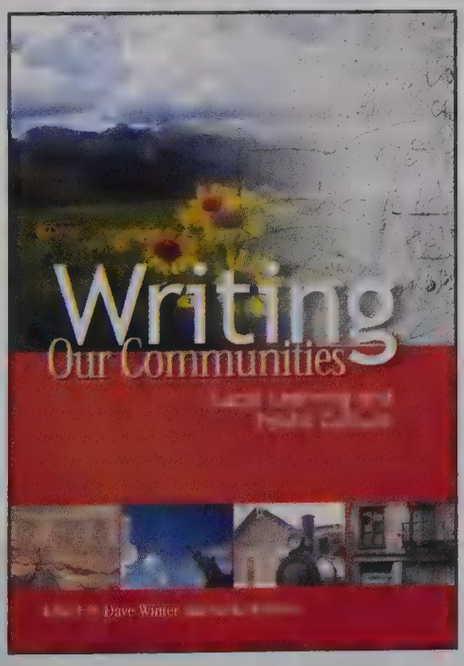

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The Community in the Classroom
Deadline: July 15, 2011
Publication Date: March 2012

Classroom community is an essential ingredient in a healthy, productive English class. In a classroom with a strong sense of community, students will write with more energy; review the writing of their peers with more effort, honesty, and sensitivity; and spur each other on to better accomplishments and have more fun in the process. Students who feel a sense of duty to their classmates and feel respected by their peers and teachers will be more open about their thoughts and amenable to learning new ideas. In what innovative ways have you established and maintained classroom community? What works of literature or writing assignments have you used to help students better understand and engage in the class as members of a larger community?

The community outside the school is also an important part of an English class. The community raises the children we educate, pays for our schools, employs our graduates, and supports (or impedes) our teaching efforts. A positive connection between the English classroom and the outside community can greatly enhance students' (and teachers') experiences in many ways. And, instilling in students a sense of duty and service to the community can richly enhance those communities far into the future. How have you gotten local leaders and businesspeople involved in projects associated with your English class? How have you involved parents or other family members in helping students develop ELA skills and knowledge? In what ways have you encouraged students to engage in community service (local, national, global, in person or online) in ways that enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, or presenting skills?

For this issue of *English Journal,* we welcome articles that speak to the ways in which the concept of community can improve students' knowledge and abilities in English.

Preventing Bullying Behaviors
Deadline: November 15, 2011
Publication Date: July 2012
Guest Editor: Nancy Mack
nancy.mack@wright.edu

Gaining social status becomes an increasing focus during the teen years. Students need to develop strategies for dealing with bullying, and as English teachers we can help students to learn positive communication strategies to establish relationships, gain success, and help others.

English teachers can create positive change by making bullying a topic in the ELA classroom: How have you used particular works of literature to examine bullying behaviors and problem-solve alternative approaches? How have you used writing and writing assignments to help students to examine their role in protecting the feelings of others, respecting differences, and preventing harassment? Which media images are most effective for generating classroom discussion about empathy and forgiveness?

Classroom management strategies can also address bullying: What are ways that teachers can routinely provide reminders, space, and time for students to rethink comments and behaviors that are offensive to others? What methods have you found effective for teaching students to communicate civilly in groups and positively influence the behaviors of others?

We should also consider forms of bullying that take place outside the classroom: What role do English teachers have in increasing awareness of problems that can arise from social pressures communicated through texting and social media websites? In what ways can bystanders be encouraged to speak out against bullying rather than being impressed or entertained by it?

It's also important to consider addressing the problems of those who exhibit bullying behavior: How do we avoid stereotyping the bully as a dysfunctional outsider and instead increase awareness of how aggressive behaviors can be hurtful to others? Can we identify various types of bullying behaviors to offer more positive strategies for gaining status, leading others, and working together?

General Interest
May submit any time

We publish articles of general interest as space is available. You may submit manuscripts on any topic that will appeal to *EJ* readers. Remember that *EJ* articles foreground classroom

practice and contextualize it in sound research and theory. As you know, *EJ* readers appreciate articles that show real students and teachers in real classrooms engaged in authentic teaching and learning. Regular manuscript guidelines regarding length and style apply.

Ongoing Features

Speaking My Mind: We invite you to speak out on an issue that concerns you about English language arts teaching and learning. If your essay is published, it will appear with your photo in a future issue of *English Journal*. We welcome essays of 1,000 to 1,500 words, as well as inquiries regarding possible subjects.

Student Voices: This is a forum for students to share their experiences and recommendations in short pieces of 300 words. Teachers are encouraged to submit the best responses from their classes, not whole class sets, please. Individual students are welcome to submit as well.

- What new information have you learned about your community or a person in your community as a result of an English class assignment? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)
- What can bystanders do to prevent bullying of students who are different (or perceived as different) from others? (Deadline: November 15, 2011)

Teacher to Teacher: This is a forum for teachers to share ideas, materials, and activities in short pieces of 300 words.

- How have you used an English assignment to get students more involved in the community or members of the community more involved in your classroom? (Deadline: July 15, 2011)
- What literature fosters the examination of bullying behaviors? (Deadline: November 15, 2011)

Original Photography

Teacher photographs of classroom scenes and individual students are welcome. Photographs may be sent as 8″ × 10″ black-and-white glossies or as an electronic file in a standard image format at 300 dpi. Photos should be accompanied by complete identification: teacher/photographer's name, location of scene, and date photograph was taken. If faces are clearly visible, names of those photographed should be included, along with their statement of permission for the photograph to be reproduced in *EJ*.

Original Cartoons

Cartoons should depict scenes or ideas potentially amusing to English language arts teachers. Line drawings in black ink should be submitted on 8½" × 11" unlined paper and be signed by the artist.

Columns and Column Editors

Challenging Texts
Editor: P. L. Thomas

Franz Kafka proclaimed that a "book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us." The authors and texts we bring into our classrooms and the acts of literacy that students perform about and because of those texts are essential aspects of creating classrooms where students become critical readers and critical writers. This column will explore the authors and texts we choose that confront the world and the worldviews of students. We also explore various theoretical approaches to literature that challenge and energize students and teachers.

Contributors should explore and share their classroom practices that address questions such as, What authors and texts confront the world and students' assumptions? What texts expand students' perceptions of and assumptions about genre? What texts confront both big ideas and the art and craft of writing? How does critical pedagogy look in literature classrooms? What literary theories do you find most generative?

Submit an electronic Word file attached to your email to the column editor, P. L. Thomas, at paul.thomas@furman.edu. Contributors are encouraged to query the column editor and share drafts of column ideas as part of the submission process.

Mentoring Matters
Editor: Thomas M. McCann

Some critics use the disturbing phrase "eating their young" to refer to the way some school leaders and veteran teachers treat new teachers. The image refers to the regrettable practice of allowing the newcomer to endure the least desirable conditions in a school or department. In contrast, caring veteran teachers will be sensitive to the need to foster growth and to promote a sense of self-efficacy in new colleagues. The development of any teacher is not complete after departure from a teacher preparation program. Professional growth continues for years, and supportive colleagues can play a significant role in influencing the development, satisfaction, and retention of teachers in the early stages of their careers. This column invites contributors to offer practicing teachers, schools, and teacher preparation programs their insights about how to mentor and support early-career English teachers, including reports from early-career teachers about their positive mentoring experiences. We especially encourage specific suggestions for practices that will help veteran teachers to support newer colleagues in developing positive relationships with students, contending with pressures to conform to test-driven curricula, handling an enormous workload, and forming collaborative relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and parents.

We invite column contributions of 500–1,500 words addressing themes about mentoring and supporting early-career teachers. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Thomas M. McCann at tmccann1@niu.edu.

Off the Shelves
Editor: Mark Letcher

We are living in a new golden age of young adult literature. Edgy and engaging titles by authors both emerging and established have been pushing the field of young adult literature (YAL) to places we've never seen before. Teen readers are seeing more innovative formats and genre-blending in their reading, are exposed to authors from around the world, and are blurring the lines between previously established "teen" and "adult" fiction.

There may be no better time to celebrate and promote the diversity, characters, issues, and pure literary craftsmanship that YAL offers its audience, and our hope is that you will help us contribute to the conversation.

This column will explore a wide range of topics related to literature written for and/or read by young adults, with a strong emphasis on recently published works. We particularly welcome the voices and experiences of secondary teachers, for whom YAL provides vital classroom reading, suggestions for eager and reluctant students, and engaging personal reading material.

Submissions of 500–1,500 words, inquiries, and suggestions for future column topics should be directed to Mark Letcher at mark.letcher@purduecal.edu.

Poetry
Editor: Anne McCrary Sullivan

In her poem "Valentine for Ernest Mann," Naomi Shihab Nye reminds us that "poems hide. In the bottoms of our shoes, / they are sleeping." Look inside your shoes, your desk drawers and kitchen cabinets, the hallways of your school, the grocery stores and garbage dumps of your community. "Find" some poems and send them to *EJ*. Choose those that seem a fit, either explicitly or implicitly, with announced themes of upcoming *EJ* issues. We are looking for well-crafted original poems in any style, serious or humorous, written by teachers, students, or those who love them. We do not consider previously published poems or simultaneous submissions.

Send by email attachment, for blind review, up to five poems with only phone number and initials on the page. In your email message, include brief biographical information. Poets whose work is published will receive two copies of the issue in which their work appears. Send submissions to EJPoetry@nl.edu. Send correspondence to Anne McCrary Sullivan at ASullivan@nl.edu.

Professional Writing in the English Classroom
Editors: Jonathan Bush and Leah A. Zuidema

Professional writing in the English classroom is rich with possibilities. Students can learn to attend carefully to audience, purpose, and situation through all genres of writing, but these rhetorical concerns are especially relevant in professional writing contexts. This column focuses on the teaching of professional writing—writing that solves day-to-day problems, accomplishes work, and enables changes in organizations and communities. Professional writing instruction involves much more than teaching memos, proposals, or résumés; it can also be a way to teach for engaged, ethical citizenship. It encompasses ideas consistent with best practices in our discipline—allowing students to think creatively and critically within complex rhetorical situations. It values multiple genres, textual conventions, and visual design. Through professional writing, students can address real issues (big or small) and work to effect change by writing to authentic audiences.

Professional writing can be combined with other, more traditional studies of writing, literature, and language. This column helps readers who seek to teach professional writing concepts and to expand their teaching to include new projects and genres. We welcome contributions from those who teach professional writing as well as those who see echoes of professional writing concepts in their other work with writing, literature, and language. Please send inquiries, submissions of 500–1,500 words, or suggestions for future column topics to Jonathan Bush at jbush@wmich.edu or Leah Zuidema at lzuidema@dordt.edu.

Research for the Classroom
Editor: Julie Gorlewski

Research provides a lens through which teachers can better understand our pedagogical successes and failures. Research illuminates the social and political contexts of education, enhancing our appreciation of students, their families, and the communities we serve. The principles of research offer a foundation for reflective practice.

Classrooms are laboratories for teaching and learning. In this era of accountability, it is important for teachers to apply research to practice. We must be collaborators in the process of deciding what works, not merely consumers of products deemed "research-based." In the spirit of a critical theoretical approach, this column will seek both to clarify and to problematize research-based practices.

Submissions for this column might include an informal mini-study or a story about an attempt—successful or not—to conduct classroom research. Contributors should focus on a classroom application of professional scholarship by considering these questions: What worked (and didn't work) in my classroom? Why? How do I know? Also welcome are short reviews of recently published books that contributors believe can enhance teachers' classroom research practices. Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words.

Authors, especially new contributors, are encouraged to submit ideas for columns. Send inquiries or submissions to gorlewsj@newpaltz.edu.

Success with ELLs
Editor: Margo DelliCarpini

English educators face increasing linguistic diversity in their classrooms. In fact, enrollment of English language learners (ELLs) in the nation's public schools between the years 1990 and 2000 grew by 105%, compared to a 12% overall growth rate among the general school population. ELLs enter our classrooms with a variety of prior school experiences, cultural expectations, and literacy experiences. Making the English language arts curriculum accessible to ELLs can pose unique challenges. However, when teachers implement strategies that target the needs of ELLs, all students can benefit.

This column will be a place where classroom teachers can find helpful ideas for teaching ELLs. Please submit manuscripts regarding challenges ELLs encounter in mainstream English classes and how you have developed innovative strategies to address their needs while enhancing the learning environment for all learners. Please share materials and practices that you have found to be especially effective for your ELLs, reports of successful collaborative instruction, motivational strategies that you use, and ways you connect content to ELLs' lives. Secondary-level English teachers are especially encouraged to submit their ideas. New authors who have ideas for columns that need development are encouraged to contact the editor. Send ideas or complete submissions of 500–1,500 words to Margo DelliCarpini at margo.dellicarpini@lehman.cuny.edu.

Teaching Young Adult Literature
Editor: Mike Roberts

As English teachers, we are constantly faced with the challenge of teaching literature that is both thought-provoking *and* entertaining. With today's YA literature better than ever, now is the time to help students discover the joy—and sometimes the pain—that comes with reading a great book. YA literature can provide students with a chance to engage in reading that is meaningful, challenging, and enjoyable. Plus, YA literature can inspire energized discussions about topics students feel passionate about.

This column will explore *teaching ideas and strategies* for some of today's newest and most popular young adult literature. This is not a column that reviews literature; it describes effective ways of *teaching* young adult literature. We encourage submissions of 1,800–2,500 words that focus on effective ways of incorporating YA literature into the curriculum. Send inquiries, ideas, and submissions to Mike Roberts at mikeroberts@rowlandhall.org.

English Journal Reviewers

Volume 100 September 2010–July 2011

English Journal represents the work of a large and diverse community of writers. We thank the following English educators for reading and responding to manuscripts for this volume of *English Journal. EJ* derives a great deal of its quality from their critical feedback, encouragement, and suggestions for revision.

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From the Editor

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Ethics in the English Classroom

Published in the summer of 2011, this issue's focus on ethics recalls for me the events of September 11, 2001. Although this September marks the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and comes on the heels of Osama bin Laden's death, we have not planned an issue dedicated to this anniversary; however, the topic of "Ethics in the English Classroom" provides an appropriate place to consider how 9/11 has emphasized the importance of teaching and learning values in high school and middle school.

In the March 2005 *English Journal,* I wrote a column titled "The Post-9/11 English Teacher," in which I reflected on the importance of our work as English teachers based on the findings of *The 9/11 Commission Report,* which had been recently published. In that column I identified several areas from the report that resonate with the English language arts curriculum and that I thought we should strengthen as we considered our own responses to 9/11 and its aftermath. As you read this list, you might think about how your local school curriculum and your own teaching have developed in these areas:

Imagination. The authors found that the success of the 9/11 attacks resulted partially from the fact that agents in the United States did not have the capacity or will to imagine them. As a result, the Commission recommended that imagination become a routine part of intelligence agencies' ways of doing business. I suggested that the events of 9/11 could help argue for the importance of imagination in education, particularly in our increasingly standardized and data-driven curriculum. The theme of the March 2010 *English Journal* issue asked, "Are We Killing Imagination?"

Globalization. According the *9/11 Commission Report* authors, members of al Qaeda thought of America as near to them, while Americans thought of them as very far away. This "cultural asymmetry" (340) echoed for English teachers the importance of using non-Western literary texts to help our students develop a better understanding of the world in which the United States is situated socially, politically, and economically.

Cooperation. The assumption that competition between agencies would strengthen US intelligence was wrong, according to the 9/11 Commissioners. Sharing resources, exchanging information, decreasing secrecy, and enhancing collaboration among agents with similar missions would have improved the United States' ability to detect and prevent terrorist attacks. Certainly the enhanced use of competitive grants in education (especially at the federal level) and the increasing attention to district-by-district comparisons of standardized exams scores have done nothing to promote cooperation among educational leaders. But there are ways we can make change in our individual classrooms. How have you helped your students to develop the skills of cooperation and collaboration and the disposition to prefer cooperation to competition?

Disaffected Students. Terrorist organizations recruit alienated young people and help them develop the capacity for self-destruction and mass murder. How have you used your English class to help students feel more positively connected to the people and communities around them?

World Religions. Spiritual beliefs have important effects on people's identities and their ways of understanding the world and the people around them. How has your English class helped students

to better appreciate differences and similarities among peace-loving religions? For help, see in this issue Mark Letcher's reviews of several YA texts with religious themes in his highly recommended "Off the Shelves" column.

The Ethics of Science and Technology. Advances in technology and science do not come without an ethical price. How have you helped your students understand ethical considerations of "progress"? How have you collaborated with teachers in the sciences and social sciences to investigate the kinds of critical thinking students should develop? Leah A. Zuidema and Jonathan Bush's "Professional Writing in the English Classroom" column in this issue offers a relevant perspective.

Coping with Fear. Many Americans were taken aback by their personal reaction to the death of bin Laden. Images of celebrating young people in cities across the United States reminded us of how frightening the terrorist had become for those who were young children ten years ago. Those same young people are now facing economic uncertainty of historic proportion and a world in which terrorism still exists. How have we helped students use writing, speaking, reading, and listening to develop the capacity to cope with legitimate but potentially damaging fear? How have we helped students to enjoy the pleasures that life holds, even in an uncertain world?

Promoting Empathy. A great deal of ill will could be avoided if more people exhibited empathy and a propensity for understanding the lives of others. Yes, it's important that we engage our students in subject matter that speaks directly to their lives, but it is also important that we expose them to places, beliefs, feelings, and ideas that they would not otherwise encounter, so that they can better understand how people who are not much like them live. Our work in this area might help to decrease terrorism (and the mistaken belief that it is sometimes justifiable) and decrease incidences of bullying, which remain far too common in our schools.

Readers interested in other English teachers' reflections on our work in the post-9/11 era, please also see the November 2006 *English Journal,* "Looking Forward: Teaching English After 9/11," which Louann Reid, then *EJ* editor, was kind enough to allow me to guest edit.

In this issue, readers will find articles that examine other ethical questions related to English language arts. Richard VanDeWeghe leads off with a reflection on ethics in the context of the Common Core Standards in his "*EJ* in Focus." We also include articles on ethics as a tool for inquiry and the ethics of grading group work. Two articles examine issues of plagiarism, focusing on creating assignments that invite discussions with students about plagiarism and that use technology in ways that avoid plagiarism. Readers will also find two articles that encourage students to critically consider the costs of war, and a "Speaking My Mind" that reflects on the spirituality of grading.

In addition, this issue includes an article on using storyboards for promoting reading and a host of informative columns and other features. Finally, we are pleased to offer, in an "*EJ* Extra," Arthur N. Applebee and Judith A. Langer's most recent research findings regarding the teaching of writing in secondary and middle schools.

Summers for teachers are all about taking time away from the conveyor belt of classes to reflect on the results of our efforts. I hope readers will find this issue motivating and reenergizing.

We are also excited about the next issue of *English Journal,* guest edited by Leila Christenbury, that celebrates the 100th anniversary of the National Council of Teachers of English. The personal reflections and wealth of historical and current information about NCTE's resources will fascinate new English teachers and those who have been members for decades. It will be an excellent way to begin a new year of school. Until then, have a great summer, and enjoy all those reading and writing plans that have been piling up since last summer!

Works Cited

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The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. Authorized. New York: Norton,2004. Print.

Ken Lindblom has taught English and writing at Columbia High School (East Greenbush, New York), Syracuse University, and Illinois State University, and he is now associate professor of English and director of English teacher education at Stony Brook University (SUNY). He has been editor of *English Journal* since 2008.

A Snapshot of Writing Instruction in Middle Schools and High Schools

Arthur N. Applebee and Judith A. Langer
The University at Albany
State University of New York

There have been many changes in policies and practices influencing the teaching of writing over the past 30 years—the advent of high-stakes testing, the press for evidence-based practice, and the availability of new technologies for writing and research. However, we have very little evidence about the extent to which such changes have influenced actual classroom practice. We began the four-year National Study of Writing Instruction (NSWI) with this concern in mind. In the May 2009 issue of *English Journal,* we reported on our analysis of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress to provide a first look at changes in the teaching of writing over the past 30 years. In this article, we provide a more detailed look, drawing on data collected from visits to 260 English, math, social studies, and science classrooms in 20 middle schools and high schools in five states (schools all chosen for reputations for excellence in the teaching of writing), interviews with 220 teachers and administrators, and with 138 students in these schools, and a national survey of 1,520 randomly selected teachers.

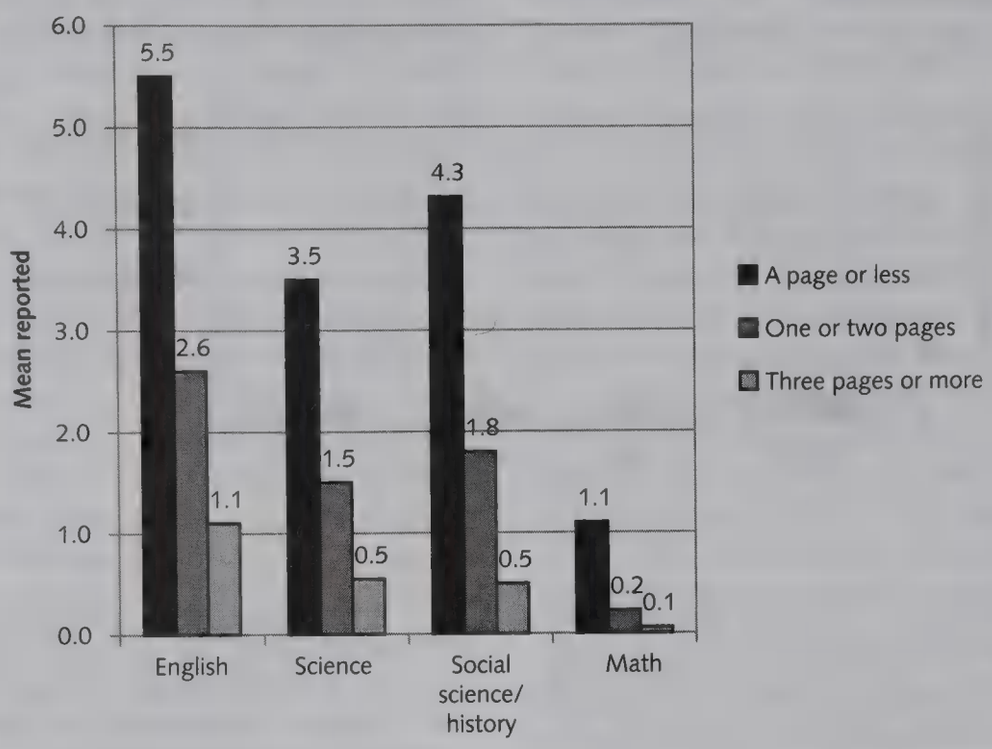
A full description of methods and procedures for the various phases of the National Study is available at http://albany.edu/cela. The most recent extensive previous study of writing instruction is Applebee's *Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas,* based on data collected during the 1979–80 school year. The earlier study combined case studies of writing across the curriculum in two contrasting high schools with a national survey of writing across the curriculum. The results of that study indicate that writing instruction 30 years ago was a relatively simple affair: the typical assignment consisted of a few sentences setting out a topic, given in class and finished up for homework. Students were expected to write a page or less, to be graded by the teacher. Almost no class time was given over to writing instruction, or even to introducing the assignment. When students were asked to write, the teacher took an average of just over three minutes to introduce the assignment, answer the inevitable procedural questions (How many pages? Single or double spaced? Can it be in pencil?), and ask the students to start writing (Applebee 74).

Things have changed since 1980, but in what ways and how much? That is the focus of this article, for which we analyzed the amount of writing currently required, the audiences for student work, the impact of high-stakes tests, the approaches to writing instruction, and the impact of technology in the core subject areas in middle schools and high schools across the United States. Because so much has changed over the 30 years, the present article addresses a number of issues in curriculum and instruction that were not salient in the earlier study. The discussion to follow will make comparisons over time when possible, using findings from the current study to provide a baseline for understanding present practice.

How Much Writing Do Students Do?

Figure 1 summarizes teachers' estimates of the amount of extended writing that students do during a typical grading period in each of the four core academic subjects: English, social science/history, science, and math. (The data are pro-rated to the

FIGURE 1. Writing Assignments in a Nine-Week Grading Period



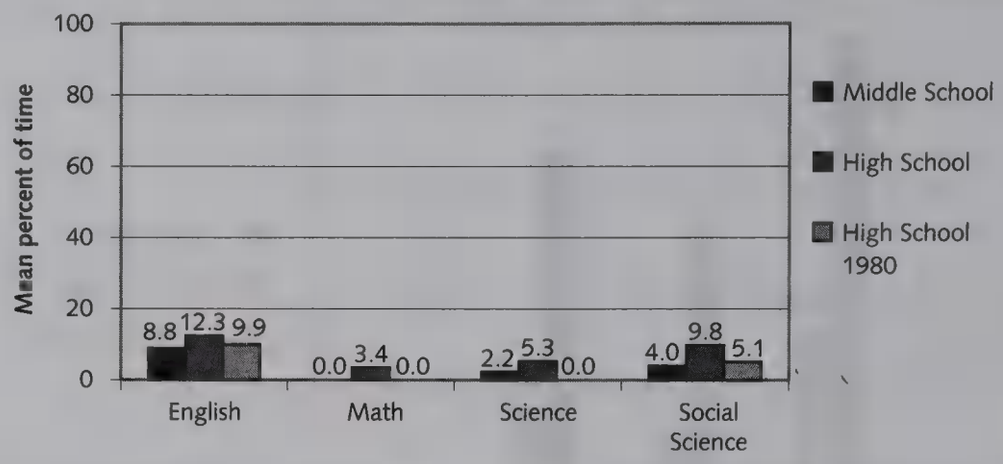
nine-week grading period that was most typical in the schools we studied.) There are several interesting things to notice in this figure. First, students write more for their English classes than for any other subject, and at the same time, they write more for their other subjects combined than they do for English. For papers of a page or less, for example, teachers report requiring 5.5 papers for English during a nine-week grading period, and a total of 8.9 for the other three classes. The differences are smaller for papers of one or two pages (2.6 for English versus 3.5 for the others combined) or three or more pages (1.1 versus 1.1), but the pattern holds. Clearly, writing goes beyond the purview of the English teacher; students' experiences across the curriculum are likely to have an important impact on how they write and the qualities that they consider important in their writing.

Further, these figures suggest that even in English class, on average, students are not writing a great deal. Combining all three types of papers in Figure 1, the typical student would be expected to produce approximately 1.6 pages a week of extended prose for English, and another 2.1 pages for the other three subjects combined. The numbers are particularly low for assignments of three or more pages, the kinds of writing where students might be expected to engage with the discipline-specific arguments and evidence called for by the Common Core Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association).

The amount of extended writing seems particularly limited when viewed against how students spend the rest of their time. Of the 8,542 separate assignments that we gathered from 138 case study students in these schools (a sampling of all of their written work in the four core content areas during a semester), only 19% represented extended writing of a paragraph or more; all the rest consisted of fill in the blank and short answer exercises, and copying of information directly from the teacher's presentation—types of activities that are best described as writing without composing. (Results were similar for middle school and high school students, with 20.9% and 17.6% of their work, respectively, involving extended writing.)

Classroom observations found a similar emphasis, with students completing written work of one sort or another much of the time, but very little of it involving extended writing. Figure 2 presents information on how much time was devoted to writing of at least paragraph length across subjects, and compares it to similar data from high schools in 1979–80. Averaging across the four core subjects in 1979–80, 3.8% of observed class time was devoted to extended writing (writing a paragraph or

FIGURE 2. Writing of Paragraph Length or More during Classroom Observations



more), compared with 7.7% in the present study. It is interesting that in all subjects, there is somewhat more time devoted to writing in the classes in the current study, and more in high school than in middle school, even though the overall amount of time devoted to writing remains distressingly low. (In math and science, there was no class time devoted to extended writing in the earlier study.)

Even in the case study schools, selected for their emphasis on writing instruction, some of the teachers commented that there was less writing going on than might be expected:

> I've only been here three years. I was relatively shocked at the little amount of writing that was done. I've been pretty disappointed. I'm a Writing Project kind of kid, and I got here and like writer's workshop and they're like, "What are you talking about?" (Grade 12 English teacher)

Another teacher hinted at some of the constraints that limit the amount of writing assigned, during an interview with a visiting field researcher:

> Well, I can't have them write two paragraphs every day because that will take me how much time to read and if I can't read it and give them thoughtful feedback, it's not very productive. I've collected exit tickets and if I don't read them and have some feedback by the next day, its value decreases. Unless I know I can give them valuable and specific feedback, I think kids can perceive when it's wasting their time, so making sure that it is clearly relevant and they know it's being read is important . . . twice a week is a good amount of practicing. . . .
>
> Each student has a spiral, they take notes, they do warm-ups, I'll give them question prompts, they'll put worksheets in there, so everything is clipped in the spiral and I'll grade it about once a week and that is on top of the exit tickets. I don't really do essays very much. I do mostly paragraphs and outlines. (High school World History teacher)

Overall, in comparison to the 1979–80 study, students are writing more in all subjects, but that writing is short, not providing students with opportunities to use composing as a way to think through the issues, to show the depth or breadth of their knowledge, or to go beyond what they know in making connections and raising new issues.

Who Reads What Students Write?

Much of the emphasis in improving writing instruction over the past several decades has focused on providing authentic tasks that would be read by responsive audiences, instead of emphasizing the teacher-as-examiner. Teachers in 1979–80 and again in the present study were asked directly about who would read the writing from a typical class. Their responses show a noticeable shift over time, with students today being considerably more likely to have teachers respond to work without assigning a grade (as part of what James Britton and his colleagues called a teacher-learner dialogue); the percent of high school teachers in the four core subjects reporting reacting without grading rose from 11.8 to 20.0 across these 30 years, and is even higher in middle school (35.2%).

Students today are also considerably more likely to be asked to share their work with other students (see fig. 3). Over half of middle school and 44% of high school English teachers reported frequently or very frequently asking students to share work with other students; in the earlier study, only 16% reported regularly asking students to share their work. Similar increases are apparent in responses from science and social studies teachers, though they are clearly less enthusiastic than their peers in the English department. Some 8.2% of high school English teachers in the present study also reported frequently providing other audiences, compared with only 3.6% in the earlier study. Middle school teachers were somewhat more likely to provide such audiences, with 11.1% reporting audiences ranging from parents and trusted adults to school administrators to community-based clubs, local professionals, or school magazines.

Even with the changes that have taken place over time, however, the large majority of the writing students do is still to the teacher-as-examiner.

What Is the Effect of High-Stakes Tests?

That we teach in an era of high-stakes tests is more than obvious, but what can we say about the effects of such testing on the teaching of writing? At the middle school level, 80.8% of the teachers of English and 78.8% of teachers of math reported that the students in a typical class would take a high-stakes tests *this year*; the comparable figures were 40.2% for science and 35.8% for social science/history. At the high school level, 47.8% of the English teachers and 70.2% of the math teachers reported a high-stakes test *this year,* compared with 56.1% in science and 41.4% in social science/history classes. For most subjects, three-quarters or more of the teachers at both levels reported their students would face a high-stakes test in their subject *in this or a later* year. The only exception was for social science/history, where only 57.9% at middle school and 49.5% at high school expected their students to have to take a high-stakes exam in their subject.

When asked about the importance of various external exams in shaping curriculum and instruction, the state exam was rated as important or very important by 85.7% of the teachers at middle school, followed by district exams (63.6%). At the high school level, state exams again topped the list, rated as important or very important by 65.6%, followed by district exams (47.7%), SATs and ACTs (45.7%), and Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams (30.4%).

Unfortunately, the importance placed on these exams does not augur well for the teaching of writing. Another series of questions asked what percent of the grade on the high-stakes test would be based on open-ended responses of any sort. The responses are summarized in Figure 4 and make it clear that relatively little writing is required even in English (an average of 30.3% of the high-stakes grade in high school, only 17.8% in middle school). These numbers are of particular concern because they include *any* open-ended responses, from single sentences to whole essays, as well as show-your-work

FIGURE 3. Audiences for Student Work: Other Students

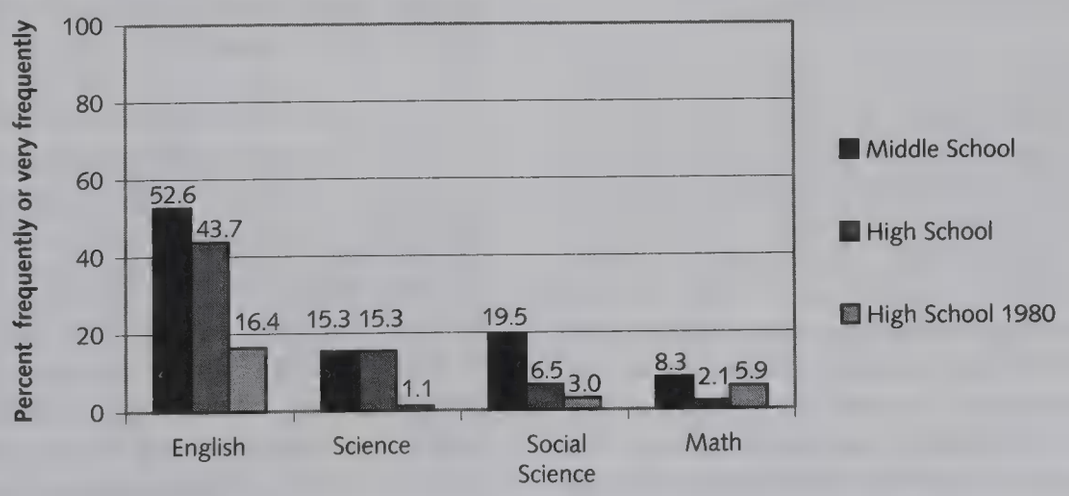
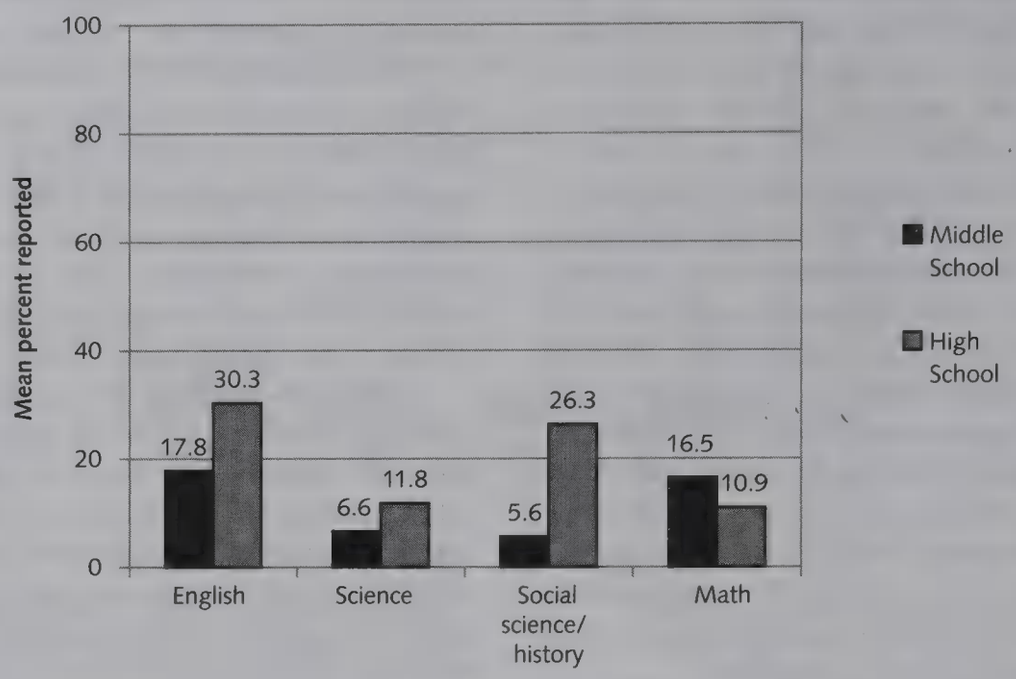


FIGURE 4. Percent of High-Stakes Grade Based on Open-Ended Responses



and explain-your-problem-solving tasks in math and science. Even including these abbreviated tasks, the use of writing as a way to demonstrate content knowledge or disciplinary thinking is minimal.

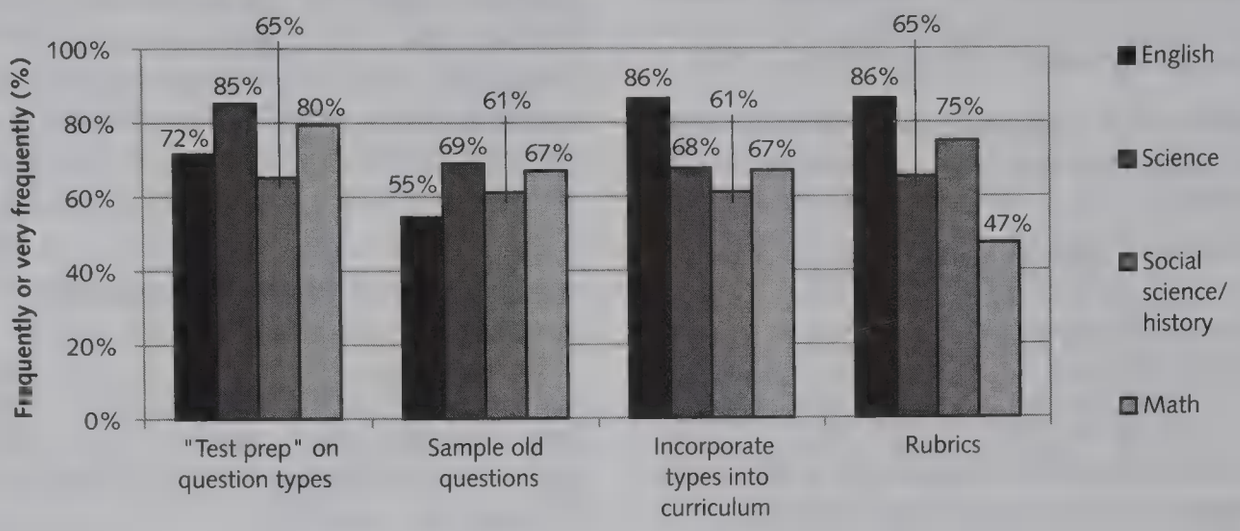
English end-of-course exams, in contrast to high-stakes external exams, gave slightly more emphasis to extended writing. Teachers reported that 24.4% of the total grade in middle school, and 41.1% in high school, would be based on writing of at least paragraph length. But even these somewhat higher numbers mean that writing on average matters less than multiple choice or short answer questions in assessing performance in English. (Percentages for the other three subjects did not differ noticeably from those for the high-stakes exams.)

Some teachers, in fact, were quite explicit about aligning their own testing with the high-stakes exams their students would face:

> Every test, no exclusions, is a mini version of the AP exam; meaning it is structured in the same way. It's half multiple choice, it's half free response. On every test, they have 15 multiple choice questions, each worth 4 points, that's a total of 60 points, and they have 4 free response questions, each worth 15 points, a total of 60. So there is a total of 120 points and then I scale it from there. The free response questions are where the writing part comes into play—a free response question is a statement of a situation and then an asking of certain questions about that situation and they have to explain their solutions, their responses to those questions. They have to write it in a cogent, coherent fashion. . . . That's the manner in which that writing component occurs and it's on every single test. That's deliberate, because what I wanted them to do, right from the get go, right from day one, was to get used to the format that they would have to face at the end of the year. (High school math teacher, discussing AP statistics)

When asked how they prepare students for the high-stakes tests they face, teachers reported heavy emphasis on some familiar types of test preparation, including frequent or very frequent "test prep" on the particular types of question that appear on the exam, and using sample questions from old exams or commercial practice materials that present similar items (see fig. 5). They similarly reported making frequent use of rubrics or scoring systems similar to those that will be used on the exam, and of incorporating the types of writing from the exam in the regular curriculum (rather than providing "test prep"). Although the provision of rubrics and the use of curriculum standards and assessments to align the curriculum can both be valuable strategies (see Langer, *Getting to Excellent*), on balance the teachers' responses suggest that high-stakes tests are having a very direct and limiting effect on classroom emphases. And given the dearth of writing required on most tests, this creates a powerful momentum away from the teaching of writing.

FIGURE 5. Test-Prep for High-Stakes Tests



On another question, some 55.1% of English teachers reported frequent practice in timed, on-demand writing, another seeming response to the writing tasks that are included on some high-stakes tests. Such tasks were less frequent in subjects that were less likely to have on-demand essay questions: 23.8% for social science/history, 17.1% in science, and 11.5% in math.

One teacher described the effects of the tests on the curriculum in her school:

> Yes, CAHSEE (California High School Exit Examination) radically changed the way teachers teach. It has an on-demand writing task, not timed, but it functions as timed because the test is so long and boring that students can't continue with it forever. Before we didn't focus on timed writing until the 11th grade—so now we include timed writing in 10th grade—in English and social studies. (High school English teacher)

Others described how "what counts" on the exam, perhaps unintentionally, influenced curriculum and instruction. The following comments are typical:

> There is not an emphasis on writing in the science state exams. I tell them not to write in complete sentences but bullet because it is more important to answer every question than to answer it well. They aren't checking how the sentence is written or structure. Spelling is not counted . . . length doesn't count. Most of the answers are bulleted. . . . The exam is three hours. If they did it any other way they would be there all day. (Eighth-grade science teacher)

> I used to do a research project but don't do it anymore because of the emphasis on tests. Research projects are so much more time intensive—go to bare bones to prepare for tests. (Eighth-grade history teacher)

> The exams have made me get rid of more writing . . . it gets to the point where you're testing on your curriculum . . . we stick to the unit, do the problems . . . a lot of the processing is skipped. They have to learn the answers, not the steps . . . and I have to address the curriculum. (Middle school math teacher)

The effects of examinations were not all bad, however; schools that focused on the International Baccalaureate or certain Advanced Placement examinations found that the exams increased their attention to writing:

> Because we're an IB school, there is a big emphasis on students being able to reflect their learning; to reflect in some type of way that they have learned something. So there is a big emphasis on writing that reflection. So they're getting writing in all their classes; not just in the language arts class. I see there's that big push as a requirement and also as a necessity for the students for us to know whether they understand by the writing and for them to be able to express that understanding in their writing. (Sixth-grade language arts teacher)

> I guess 15 years ago, I would never have asked my kids to justify anything; it was just an answer, and I graded it. And now, I am trying to get them to be able to validate what their answer is and be able to put it into words so that they can support it. Just

> a basic skill that everyone needs to be able to support their arguments. I do think that has changed. I think one of the main influences in that has been the AP test, probably. (High school math chair)

And some changes in state exams do seem to be reinforcing the place of writing in the curriculum:

> Writing is quite significant in geometry because students are writing proofs. They have to communicate their thoughts through their written language. They are constantly writing down reasons for why they are doing what they're doing; they're explaining themselves using written language. The recent switch in the [New York State] Regents curriculum to include the communication piece is playing out in the classroom. In geometry, writing and reading and language are really interwoven in the curriculum. I'd have to say you couldn't really teach geometry without the written part. In that way it's different than algebra, where incorporating language would be a little different. (Tenth-grade math teacher)

In the earlier study, carried out during 1979–80, pressure from external exams was nonexistent. Norm-referenced standardized tests were used to assess the progress of individual students, but they were not tied to the curriculum and did not carry high stakes for schools and teachers. In the current study, for better or for worse, external examinations are driving many aspects of curriculum and instruction.

What Kinds of Writing Instruction Do Teachers Emphasize?

For classes that were asked to do any writing of at least paragraph length, teachers were asked about their typical approaches to the teaching of writing. Responses are summarized in Table 1, in order of decreasing emphasis in English classes.

Teachers of all subjects reflected a concern with being clear about what is expected in particular types of writing assignments. The most frequent emphasis in all four subject areas was to clearly specify the specific parts that must be included (ranging from 94.4% of English teachers to 69.4% of math teachers); this was paralleled with an across-subject emphasis on providing rubrics

TABLE 1. Approaches to Writing Instruction in Classes that Assign Writing of at Least Paragraph Length

	PERCENT OF TEACHERS REPORTING FREQUENTLY OR ALMOST ALWAYS			
	English (n = 176)	Science (n = 117)	Social Science/ History (n = 155)	Math (n = 71)
Clearly specify the specific parts that must be included in a particular kind of writing assignment	94.4	82.0	79.4	69.4
Spend class time generating and organizing ideas or information before writing	90.6	37.5	60.7	25.2
Teach specific strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and organizing written work	90.1	29.0	41.4	28.4
Provide models of effective responses for students to read, analyze, and emulate	84.6	36.7	56.2	36.9
Provide rubrics that highlight the characteristics of good responses	82.2	59.0	62.6	51.6
Ask students to work together to plan, edit, or revise their work	60.4	37.6	40.1	44.2
Base writing on inquiry tasks involving immediate, concrete data as the basis for writing	44.4	68.3	42.6	36.8
Organize a "workshop" environment in which students receive individual attention as they engage in learning the content, allowing for cycles of investigation, writing, and revision	43.9	16.2	12.9	8.4

that highlight the characteristics of a good response (ranging from 82.2% of English teachers to 51.6% of math teachers). English teachers reinforced this through the use of models of effective responses for students to read and analyze (84.6%), as to a lesser extent did social science/history teachers (56.2%).

Process-oriented writing instruction was obvious in English classes (90.6% frequently spending class time on generating and organizing ideas before writing, and 90.1% teaching specific strategies for planning, drafting, revising, and organizing), and to a lesser extent in social science/history (60.7% reporting class time on generating and organizing ideas before writing, and 41.4% teaching specific strategies).

Collaborative work remains less popular than teacher-led activities. Some 60.4% of English teachers reported frequently having students work together on their writing, and 43.9% reported organizing a workshop environment. Both approaches were less popular in other subject areas.

The following notes from a classroom observation illustrate how some of these emphases came together in a twelfth-grade social studies class to support students' revisions of their work:

> Teacher opened class explaining that their "Privacy Project Portfolios" were due next week. Today they'd have the opportunity to do a Gallery Walk . . . and give feedback (using feedback forms and rubrics) on portfolios before they're turned in.
>
> Teacher outlined what the 1–5 scale meant in more specific terms. Rubrics clearly defining 1–5 are posted in the back of the room and also distributed for reference during the Gallery Walk. After expectations have been clearly outlined, students begin their Gallery Walk with their small groups, evaluating all projects except their own. Groups will then receive the feedback from the rest of the class in order to make revisions before the project is due.
>
> Students are heard intensively (but quietly) reviewing the criteria rubric, trying to come to consensus on what an appropriate score will be for each section. Students are clearly actively engaged in the process, and the discussions and process seem familiar to them. The teacher was left free to monitor small groups, and have one-on-one discussions as needed regarding the evaluation/feedback process. Students were comfortable and familiar with the rubric, so much of Ms. H's time was spent observing and "listening in." She would occasionally step in and ask some pointed questions in order to elicit thinking about the rubric and the process.
>
> At the end of class they were able to briefly discuss, when they gave a 1, why they gave a 1. Ms. H: "Hopefully this will create a sense of urgency, that even if you thought you were done, you're not." Revision was encouraged.

As a set, these activities reflect a much more sophisticated understanding of writing instruction than was evident in 1979–80. In the earlier study, instruction took place mostly as a response to completed work, rather than as a systematic attempt to clarify the task and to provide strategies and collaborative activities that would help students complete it successfully. Only 32% of English teachers in the earlier survey, for example, reported making regular use of model responses, compared with 85% in the present study; only 37% reported brainstorming activities before writing, compared with 91% spending time on generating and organizing ideas in classrooms today.

The complication is that although teachers seem to have a better understanding of appropriate techniques to use when they assign writing, competing priorities such as test preparation constrain the amount of time given to writing instruction. Table 2 summarizes writing instruction observed during classroom observations in the 20 schools selected for local reputations for excellence in the teaching of writing. These observations represent "best case" scenarios, both in the selection of the schools and in the fact that teachers were aware that our teams of observers were interested in the teaching of writing. Even so, the percent of class time focused on any aspect of writing instruction was very small. In the English classes observed, 6.3% of time was focused on the teaching of explicit writing strategies, 5.5% on the study of models, and 4.2% on evaluating writing, including discussion of rubrics or standards. (Since multiple things were often going on at once, summing these percentages would overestimate the time devoted to writing instruction.) To put the numbers in perspective, in a 50-minute period, students would have on average just over three minutes of instruction related to explicit writing strategies, or a total of 2 hours and 22 minutes in a nine-week grading period.

TABLE 2. Writing Instruction Observed in Schools with Reputations for Excellence in the Teaching of Writing

	English (n=72 classes)	Science (n=59 classes)	Social Science/ History (n=58 classes)	Math (n=55 classes)
Classes with any writing-related instruction (%)	50.2	32.4	17.1	27.5
Percent of time emphasizing:				
Explicit writing strategies	6.3	3.0	0.7	0.0
Study of models	5.5	5.1	3.4	9.6
Rubrics or standards (evaluating)	4.2	1.5	1.6	0.9
Vocabulary	4.1	8.8	1.4	3.6
Structure and organization	3.1	0.4	0.3	0.0
Grammar or usage	1.4	0.5	0.3	0.0
Spelling	1.4	0.0	0.2	0.0

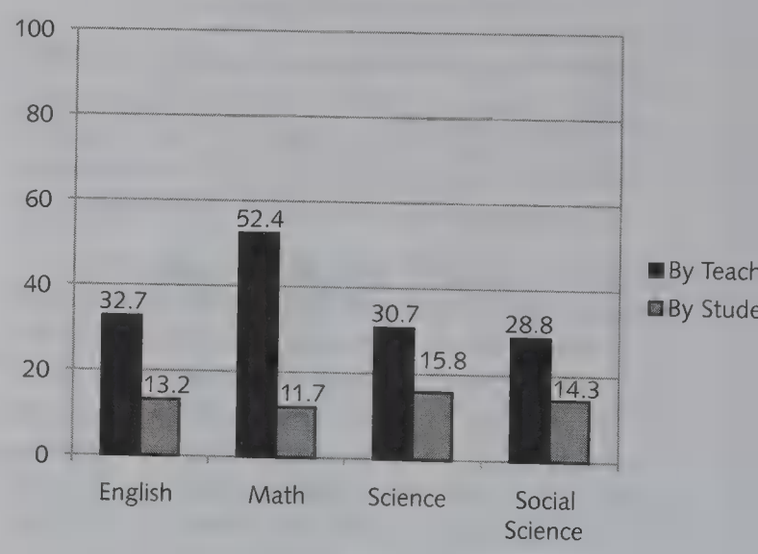
Writing-related instruction was observed most often in English classes, but the study of models was particularly popular across subject areas, while vocabulary received extra attention in science and math.

Comparable data are not available from the earlier study, which found that most writing instruction came after the fact, in teacher comments and suggestions on completed work.

How Has Technology Influenced the Teaching of Writing?

The Common Core Standards emphasize the appropriate use of technology beginning in the elementary grades, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress has begun to assess students' writing achievement using computers and word-processing software. In spite of such developments, teachers have been slow to embrace these no-longer-new technologies. Figure 6 summarizes the use of technology by students and teachers in the classrooms observed. Two things are striking in this figure. First, with the exception of math, less than a third of the classrooms made use of any technology. And second, when technology was used, it was usually used by the teacher. In fact, the technologies that were in use were primarily presentational. This is clear in a list of the types of technology in use in 5% or more of the classes observed:

FIGURE 6. Percent of Observed Classes with Technology in Use



- Overhead projector or ELMO used by the teacher (29.2% of the classes)
- PowerPoint used by the teacher (11.8%)
- Internet used by the teacher (7.7%)
- Film or video shown by the teacher (6.0%)
- Word processing used by the students (5.1%)

TABLE 3. Uses of Computers and Word Processors for Writing

	PERCENT OF TEACHERS REPORTING FREQUENTLY OR ALMOST ALWAYS			
	English (n=180)	Science (n=181)	Social Science/ History (n=181)	Math (n=146)
For finding source materials on the Internet	60.0	63.5	66.5	12.3
For writing first drafts	42.3	34.2	37.0	4.9
For embedding video, audio, or graphics in their writing	18.4	30.3	20.5	5.7
For editing and revising their own work	48.6	41.3	44.1	8.0
For sending work in progress to peers for response or editing	23.7	15.4	14.6	6.9
For final copy to hand in	75.8	56.3	59.9	12.3

Although there were isolated uses of other technologies, from social networking to Blackboard to wikis and blogs, for the most part technology seems to be reinforcing traditional patterns of teacher-centered instruction rather than opening up new possibilities. Most teachers have not embraced the notion that the use of technology in the classroom can be a powerful way to cognitively engage students in content learning.

Though instructional uses of technology were limited, teachers reported considerable use of word processing for writing. Table 3 summarizes the various uses, separately by subject area. Uses of the computer for writing are fairly similar across English, science, and social science classes, and almost nonexistent in math. Fully 75.8% of the English teachers reported that students in a typical class frequently or almost always use word processing for final copy to turn in; there was only a little variation by level, with 71.3% at middle school and 80.2% at high school. The computer is also frequently used for finding source material on the Internet. In a pattern that also appears in National Assessment data (Applebee and Langer), students seem least likely to use the computer for their first drafts (42.3% in English), somewhat more likely to use the computer for editing and revising (48.6% in English), and most likely to use it for final copy. This reflects a pattern in which students begin their writing in class without access to a computer, and copy it over later in a computer lab, the library, or at home.

Students seem to mostly use word processors as a powerful typewriter, with little embedding of video, audio, or graphics. The one exception is in science classes, where 30.3% of the teachers report their students frequently or almost always embed other material, presumably as data tables, graphs, or diagrams illustrating their work. Again, collaborative work is rare, with only 23.7% in English, and fewer in other subjects, reporting frequent sending of work in progress to peers for response or editing.

Teachers' estimates of whether students "frequently" or "almost always" use computers and word processing for the drafts they hand in tend to overestimate how much of students' work is written in this way. Of the 1,626 samples of extended writing collected from targeted students in the 20 schools with local reputations for excellence in the teaching of writing, only 23% at middle school and 42% at high school were composed on a computer. There are several reasons for the discrepancy, including the fudge factor in "frequently" and "almost always," as well as the emphasis on test preparation and test practice, which in most schools is still a paper-and-pencil activity. Indeed, some schools and districts forbid the use of word processors because these are not allowed on the relevant high-stakes tests (Russell and Abrams).

When schools have the knowledge and resources to embrace technology, the effects can be impressive. The following notes are drawn from a field researcher's interview with a middle school Humanities chair

describing the effects of technology in a school with computers in every classroom, three technology labs, computers in the library, and laptop carts:

> Whole writing process shifted with technology. Drafting made accessible, students are more likely to revise when you can just go back and fix things easier. Facilitates notion of revision. Has influenced/created different kinds of writing . . . blogging, lots of writing, real audience. Book trailers (movie trailer for books). Students still had to be concise and choose their words. Use of wikis. Lots of PowerPoint presentations. Emailing teachers is available. Email as modern day letter writing but they are doing more of it. SmartBoards in every room makes technology accessible to the whole class. Can show a website without bringing entire class to a computer lab. . . . Some teachers use it for webquests, drafting, final drafts, research.

Writing Then and Now

The snapshot of writing instruction presented here looks quite different from the picture that emerged in 1979–80. In 1979–80, students were typically provided with a question to be answered in a page or less, with instruction taking place after the fact, in the comments and responses that teachers offered on completed work. In contrast, teachers today report emphasizing a variety of research-based instructional practices (Graham and Perin), including clearly specifying what is required in a particular type of writing, teaching specific strategies for prewriting, writing, and revision, using models of successful responses for students to analyze, critique, and emulate, and treating computers and word processors as important tools that support students' learning to write.

If notions of good instruction have changed, for a variety of reasons the typical classroom does not provide much of it. In 1979–80, the majority of the writing that students completed was writing without composing—short answer or fill in the blank tasks, or copying from the board, where the resulting "text" is completely structured by the teacher or textbook. Currently that picture looks much the same, with students completing many more pages of exercises and copying than they do of original writing of even a paragraph in length. And even some of the extended writing that students do complete is constrained as practice for on-demand, timed assessments where the instruction that occurs is focused on successful test performance rather than on the development of the skills and strategies that will serve a student well in the varied tasks that make up the larger domain of writing.

We can illustrate the changes that have taken place with two examples, one drawn from the earlier study, and the other from the present one. Both are social studies tasks that ask students to deal with broad historical questions.

The question from the earlier study (see fig. 7), on the changes that occurred during the Reformation, is in many ways an impossible task, requiring book-length treatment to be handled well. It becomes a possible task only when it is seen as a request for a summary of material that has already been covered by the teacher or textbook. To do well, the students have to have learned a series of generalizations about the Reformation and must be able to repeat them in their own words; the task does not ask for original analysis or synthesis.

Now consider the task in Figure 8, on the causes of the French Revolution. Like the question from the earlier study, this is essentially a test of what students know about a particular historical period. Indeed, the instructions begin by asking them how they would answer the question based on what they have already learned. The task continues, however, providing them with a set of new source materials to analyze in light of their knowledge of the historical period and in light of the question that is posed. This is a considerably more difficult task than the earlier example, and its structure provides a variety of supports to help students complete it successfully (including some comprehension questions following each of the documents that are not presented here). Such questions are typically accompanied by a rubric that explains

FIGURE 7. A Typical Writing Task from 1979–80

Western Europe on the eve of the Reformation was a civilization going through great changes. In a well-written essay describe the political, economic, social, and cultural changes Europe was going through at the time of the Reformation. (25 points)—(Ninth-grade social studies) (Applebee 74)

FIGURE 8. A Typical Writing Task Now

Causes of the French Revolution

Historical Context:

The French Revolution of 1789 had many long-range causes. Political, social, and economic conditions in France contributed to the discontent felt by many French people—especially those of the third estate. The ideas of the intellectuals of the Enlightenment brought new views of government and society. The American Revolution also influenced the coming of the French Revolution.

- Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:
  1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
  2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
  3. Based on your own knowledge and the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
  4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
  5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

- *Question: What were the most important causes of the French Revolution?(Discuss three.) (Tenth-grade social studies)*

how the essay will be graded, providing a tool for revision and self-evaluation. New York State, where this question originated, offers a generic rubric for the document-based questions on state examinations. A superior paper (scoring 5 on a 0 to 5 scale):

- Thoroughly develops all aspects of the task evenly and in depth
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Incorporates relevant information from at least xxx documents [xxx varies by item]
- Incorporates substantial relevant outside information
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme (Office of State Assessment)

This task is typical of many that we have seen across subject areas, with built-in scaffolding and an obvious attempt to be clear about what success will require. Many of the other tasks we have seen exhibit some of the problems that are buried even in this example, however. Although the task requires students to work with new material, the underlying task remains one that begins with a restatement or summary of points that have been developed in previous classes or in the textbook, and then using the new documents to illustrate (or "richly support") those points. There is also a tendency in tasks of this type to generate formulaic writing. In this particular case, the admonition to "discuss three" causes of the French Revolution points strongly toward a five-paragraph theme, albeit one to be elaborated with new details drawn from the accompanying primary source documents.

George Hillocks Jr. noted this tendency toward formulaic writing in his critique of state writing assessments, and teachers in the schools we studied were quite aware of the dangers, if resigned to the necessity. As one put it,

> We tend to be repetitive of what we want them to write, what we want them to include, and . . . the process that they need to use in order to get everything included. I think we become repetitive, but it's the nature of the beast—same things with TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and

> Skills); this is what you have to write, this is what has to be included, you have to include this number of quotes, you have to respond to your quote, so I think our essays become the same thing. We are able to use different literature, but the essays tend to have the same process. Same outline. (Twelfth-grade English teacher)

On the brighter side, some teachers have been successful in revising their curriculum and instruction in response to new knowledge about effective instruction, educating students who do well on high-stakes tests because they are immersed in a rich and engaging curriculum (Langer, *Getting to Excellent*). At the end of their visit, one of our teams of field researchers described such a high school program, warts and all:

> From the teachers observed and interviewed, it seemed the majority of teachers had an in depth understanding of how writing can propel thinking, how writing can help students understand content, and how writing can help teachers understand what students come away with. They draw on a wide repertoire of approaches and strategies. Most impressive is that teachers have specific intentions, and are very reflective about the writing strategies they teach. Some of the strategies observed were: deconstructing prompts, how to pose questions, how to anticipate readers' questions, strategies for paraphrasing, Socratic Seminars, use of criteria charts, writing on "Classroom Graffiti Walls."
>
> In the English Department several years ago, the focus was on the Jane Schaffer Method. They stopped four years ago, but some teachers still use elements of it. The materials have a lot of value, but the intense focus on structure is problematic. Many teachers stopped with teaching particular structures, and students wrote very formulaic essays—almost "fill in the blank." At the same time, it did help struggling students. They knew how to proceed. . . .
>
> The majority of writing observed was process-based. Even in classes where students would be engaging in on-demand writing, class time was spent on drafting, sharing, and analyzing student writing. It seemed there really was a lot of small group work, and a lot of student "talking." Discussion of the process and ideas. Sometimes the "talk" helped craft the writing, and sometimes the writing was preliminary to full-class discussion. For example, after engaging in the "Graffiti Wall," and looking at letters written during the Great Depression, one student from each small group answered the "essential question" for their unit. And that was, "How did ordinary Americans endure the hardship of the Great Depression?" Oral language was an essential piece in many classrooms. (Field Researchers' Summary and Interpretation of School Visit)

The Bottom Line

Clearly the 30 years since the previous national study have seen a great deal of development in teachers' conceptions of writing and its importance in learning. Across subject areas, teachers voice an understanding of the ways in which writing can contribute to learning, see writing as a valuable tool for assessing students' understanding, and in many cases see unique and particular roles that writing could play within their own disciplines.

At the same time, the actual writing that goes on in typical classrooms across the United States remains dominated by tasks in which the teacher does all the composing, and students are left only to fill in missing information, whether copying directly from a teacher's presentation, completing worksheets and chapter summaries, replicating highly formulaic essay structures keyed to the high-stakes tests they will be taking, or writing the particular information the teacher is seeking. Given the constraints imposed by high-stakes tests, writing as a way to study, learn, and go beyond—as a way to construct knowledge or generate new networks of understandings (Langer, *Envisioning Knowledge, Envisioning Literature*)—is rare.

In the various phases of the National Study of Writing Instruction, we also saw examples of teachers and schools that were very successful in creating rich and engaging programs. The challenge for the profession is how to ensure that such programs can continue to flourish and spread to other schools in spite of the constraints and pressures that are generated by the demands of high-stakes tests, those that omit writing altogether or lead to formulaic teaching, as well as those that, in a few cases, seem to make positive contributions to what teachers do. The new Common Core Standards, with their recognition of writing as a central strand comparable to reading in the teaching of English language arts and other subjects across the grades, may offer an opportunity to rethink what counts within the

high-stakes environment in which schools and teachers now function. But even more critical will be how those Standards are translated into the assessments that will ultimately shape what happens in schools and classrooms.

Note

The National Study of Writing Instruction is a collaboration between the Center on English Learning & Achievement at the University at Albany, and the National Writing Project at the University of California–Berkeley, with additional funding from the Spencer Foundation. We are grateful to all of our partners in this project, as well as to the schools and teachers that participated in the various phases of the study.

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English Journal Wins Award!

English Journal has won a 2011 Excel Award for general excellence in journal publishing from Association Media and Publishing, formerly known as SNAP (Society of National Association Publications). In announcing the award, the organization cited *EJ*'s clean layout and strong writing.

A Literacy Education for Our Times

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The authors of the new Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy believe that college and career-ready students who meet the standards in that document exhibit a number of "capacities of the literate individual." One of these is the capacity "to understand other perspectives and cultures" through reading classic and contemporary literature. Such students "actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and writing, and they are able to communicate effectively with people from varied backgrounds" (National Governors 3–4).

We English teachers have always tried to nurture the deep understanding called for in this portrait of literate readers. We've helped students identify with characters' conflicts and empathize with characters' struggles from *their* point of view; we've encouraged our students to understand cultural and racial perspectives different from their own. Indeed, our professional standards call for us to promote this depth and breadth through critical reading:

> Students' understanding of society and its history—and their ability to recognize and appreciate difference and diversity—are expanded when they read primary texts from across a wide demographic spectrum. (NCTE and IRA 28)

> Through literary reading, students learn to think about and to question their own perspectives; they learn to assume different, critical stances toward events, circumstances, and issues. (30)

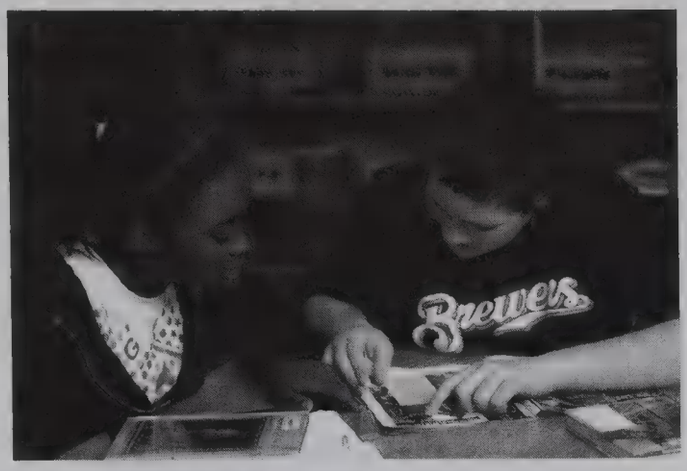
> By understanding and appreciating differences, students build the groundwork for unity and shared experience. (41)

My first response to this Common Core State Standard portrait of the literate student was, What's new in this *new* literacy goal? Perhaps not much, you might say. In these times of obscene corporate profiteering, ugly politics, and environmental pillaging, it may not be new, but it surely seems critical to our survival as a civil, humane, global community for us to reflect a bit by asking such questions as the following:

- Is what we *are* doing effective?
- Are we even doing *enough*?
- Do our efforts affect students outside the classroom or beyond school?

Hate crimes are on the rise again, particularly those against certain racial and religious groups ("2008 Hate Crime Statistics"); political leaders and ordinary citizens now embrace with gusto the politics of anger and rage; some people issue veiled or actual threats while others carry out violent acts, as we saw in the shooting of Congresswoman Giffords and other innocent people in Tucson; and corporate control of water resources raises such threatening ethical issues as "Who will make the decisions that affect our future, and who will be excluded?" (Snitow, Kaufman, and Fox, qtd. in Lohan).

The lawful and unlawful acts of hate, violence (threatened and actual), and greed that we see today



Thompson-McClellan Photography

are destructive forces that haven't changed from the last century; they're just more pronounced and more common. It is not coincidental that, at the same time, we see such equally pronounced, but far less visible, constructive forces, such as compassion in the Katrina and Haiti relief efforts and human unity in the global invitation to sign the international Charter for Compassion ("Charter for Compassion"). It is a sad commentary on our times that these two forces are so out of balance, and it suggests that it is time to substantially increase our efforts to nurture *otherness* in the teaching of literature (including creative nonfiction) if we are to help our students become truly college and career ready, not to mention *life ready.*

James Martin points out in *The Meaning of the 21st Century: A Vital Blueprint for Ensuring Our Future* that this is the century in which "humankind finds itself on a nonsustainable course—a course that, unless it is changed, will lead to catastrophes of awesome consequence" (3). This is the century of transition from the "untenable course we are on today toward a world where we learn to control the diverse forces we are unleashing . . . [a world where] young people will be the generation that brings about this great transition" (5). If we can agree that education plays an important role in this transition, then we ought to ask of our roles as English teachers, What *is* a good literacy education for our times? And, how should we support it?

What Is a Good Literacy Education for Our Times?

Most people would agree that a good literacy education includes advanced skills in "reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visually representing" (NCTE and IRA 1). But many have different ideas on the purpose of a good literacy education. Some, for instance, believe the purpose is that students become inspired by learning itself, thereby becoming lifelong readers and writers. Others think the goal is to succeed in the workforce (which raises the question, What does *success* mean?). Our professional organizations (NCTE and IRA) say the purpose is "to pursue life's goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society" (25). An education for our times doesn't exclude any of these purposes, but, if Martin is right (and I think he is), it must also include a focus on ethical responsibility, human value, and community stewardship, especially as this century, in particular, gets underway.

Students who develop knowledge of personal responsibility and the skills that go with it learn about the interconnectedness of problems and solutions, as Martin says (5), and they learn about their own interconnectedness with others. They learn to "give back" in some civic way—to their community, nation, or world, as President Obama has suggested through universal voluntary public service. People who give back learn to be mindful of and to respect alternative, often alien perspectives and values, putting understanding before judgment; they learn that the lot of others is connected with their own human destiny; and they learn to be compassionate with the struggles of other people, other cultures, other nations. They learn, as the great humanistic traditions of the past teach, the meaning that comes with being connected to something larger than themselves.

How, we might ask, *do* students learn personal responsibility and ethical behavior in school settings?

How, we might ask, *do* students learn personal responsibility and ethical behavior in school settings? The most likely way is through the daily words, actions, and behaviors of adults and peers. Teachers and administrators do act responsibly and ethically, I believe, but they do not, I fear, do so in ways that are deliberative and instructive. "The students are watching us," say Theodore R. Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer: "*They watch us all the time.* The students, that is. They listen to us, sometimes.

They learn from all that watching and listening" (xvii; italics in original). What they see is the way *we demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior in using influence and power,* or how *we act responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind.* So how do we become more mindful, more deliberate, about enacting a literacy education for our times?

Below, I focus on three forms of knowledge that may become part of a framework for a literacy education that, although not *new,* is ripe for *renewal*: *mindfulness, unity,* and *compassion.* They not only have content (what they mean) but also skills (how they are practiced), and, as I hope to show, they are natural ways of learning and being.

Mindfulness Helps Students Notice What Is Important

When students practice mindfulness, they pay close attention to detail, both external and internal. For instance, they observe the physical characteristics of fictional characters as they change over time; they note the ways tone works through words in an essay to influence their understanding; or they attend to the shifting meaningfulness of precise words that convey irony in poetry. When they reflect internally, they think deeply about those things that matter to them, such as personal problems that resonate thematically in literature and those characters with whom they identify. If they learn to read like writers, they begin to write mindfully—developing character through "showing"; finding the power of words to influence others' reading; and viewing the making of meaning in literature as part of the larger realm of the making of meaning in life. Mindful writers, in short, pay attention to things (e.g., sources of pain, challenges, nuanced feelings) they would not ordinarily notice.

Students who spend time in mindful school environments learn to become mindful individuals. They learn to pay close attention in a world that constantly forces them to do just the opposite.

A habit of mind that can be nurtured in classrooms, mindfulness can be cultivated in English and language arts classrooms by mindful teachers. The following are some ways this might happen:

- We can show students how *they* as readers pay attention to details (e.g., character development in fiction and the strategic semantic and spatial use of words in poetry), and they can help students to "show, not tell" as writers by incorporating concrete details and compelling images in their work (not "She was really mad" but "Her eyelids half-closed, her lips rolled in and squeezed, and her whole head started shaking").
- We can be truly *present to* students. We can make special efforts to convey, daily, that we value each student—we can notice the smallest student achievement, recall what comments students have contributed to class discussions, remember students' hobbies and interests, and listen to students, as Mary Rose O'Reilley says, "with a very precise and focused attention, listening, watching. Not being somewhere else, answering some question that hasn't been asked" (3).
- We can notice how our colleagues in other content areas promote mindfulness, such as the science teacher who helps students observe the physical characteristics of plant growth in science classes as they record changes over time; or the math teachers, for instance, who use think-aloud protocols (talking out loud) as they examine closely mathematical data sets *the ways mathematicians actually do.*

Students who spend time in mindful school environments learn to become mindful individuals. They learn to pay close attention in a world that constantly forces them to do just the opposite, a world where information moves at nanosecond speeds and where the particulars that inform generalities zip by most of them most of the time. Mindfulness slows learners down, forces focus, makes them notice and appreciate, in natural ways.

Unity Helps Students Feel Connected

Unity means that students feel connected to their inner lives as well as to something outside themselves. Steven Glazer says they identify with the non ego: "One begins to feel *a part* of something rather than *apart* from something" (82; italics in original). Many students feel spiritually alive and more engaged in learning when they have opportunities to feel more connected to their inner selves through reflective activities such as journal

writing or solitary reflection. Others feel engaged when they connect deeply to another person (a friend, teacher, or relative) or group of people (ethnic group, club, team). While some students find connections with nature, others find them through religion, hobbies, and social-political interests, as Heather E. Bruce pointed out in her recent *English Journal* article, "Green(ing) English: Voices Howling in the Wilderness?": e.g., environmental justice movements, place-based community projects, and sustainable efforts to prevent environmental degradation through wars.

All students need to feel they belong; it is natural and it can happen naturally in schools:

- We have many opportunities to promote unity through thematic teaching. Following the thinking of Parker Palmer, we can "evoke the spirituality of any discipline by teaching in ways that allow the 'big story' told by the discipline to intersect with the 'little story' of the student's life. Doing so not only brings up personal possibilities for connectedness but also helps students learn the discipline more deeply" (9). Whether teaching texts from the civil rights movement or war literature, for instance, we can help students see how the beliefs, values, and feelings held by people in that literature are not too different from those held by most adolescents (e.g., indignation, moral justification, righteous civil action) today. We can help students see how literature portrays human dilemmas and complex interpersonal tangles as the real stuff that binds all of us as fellow human beings. Big story + little story = unity.
- We can support students' sense of belonging if classrooms offer sacred spaces. In these spaces, daily rituals such as morning meetings, periodic councils, classroom activities such as journal writing that encourage reflection, and discussions that help students understand and value their interconnectedness with others support students' innate need for spiritual connectedness. Feeling connected helps them learn more and learn more deeply.
- We can join or form school-based study groups that inquire into the ways school curricula—e.g., literary selections, social studies texts—and district and state standards reinforce principles of unity. We can also join or form subject area networks that examine how academic achievement is affected by students' senses of belonging (VanDeWeghe 27).

When we help our students see their connectedness to people, cultures, values, and perspectives outside their immediate worlds, we teach respect for difference and we nurture their awareness of what it means to be a member of the classroom and school communities as well as the human community. It too is a natural way of being.

Through the exercise of intellectual compassion, students learn that not everything has only two sides, that some, in fact, have many sides.

Compassion Helps Students Become Attuned

Through mindfulness, and, out of a sense of unity, comes *compassion. Emotional compassion* means entering into the feelings of another person or persons. Thus students may feel emotional compassion for someone who suffers, for a community in crisis (witness Haiti after the earthquake), or for a character in a film or novel. There is also *intellectual compassion,* though it is less well known and, sadly, less practiced in schools. Most students today learn bilateral ways of thinking—e.g., that there are only two sides to an argument; that certain ideological ways of thinking are privileged over others; or that alien beliefs and customs are somehow wrong or, at best, weird. But through the exercise of intellectual compassion, students learn that not everything has only two sides, that some, in fact, have many sides.

Both emotional and intellectual compassion help students become *attuned* to the feeling and thinking of others. Psychologist Daniel Goleman considers attunement crucial to students' success in their social worlds:

> Teamwork, open lines of communication, cooperation, listening, and speaking one's mind—rudiments of social intelligence . . . [combine with individual] emotional competencies—being attuned to the feelings of those we deal with, being able to handle disagreements so they do not escalate, having the ability to get into flow states while doing our work. (148–49)

Students at all levels ought to have multiple opportunities to experience compassionate conduct:

- We can ask how our students will learn to *understand* diverse perspectives *before* judging them. For instance, when students are taught how to argue a point, the most common graphic aid is the straight vertical line separating one view from another: my side and the other side. The visual learning tool itself reinforces two-sided, dialectical thinking. By contrast, imagine teaching argument using a triangle, square, or pentagon, looking at a controversial issue from many perspectives. Intellectual compassion calls for just such multiplicity to take the broad perspective of understanding *before* arguing. It calls for students to enter into the minds and values of others, see issues from perspectives other than their own, understand the validity of other perspectives, and thereby enrich their own.

We can support compassionate habits of mind when we introduce students to difference and alternity with an air of inquiry, such as when we invite tentatively held interpretations of poetry. (Not "What does this poem mean?" but "What *might* this poem be about?")

- We can support compassionate habits of mind when we introduce students to difference and alternity with an air of inquiry, such as when we invite tentatively held interpretations of poetry. (Not "What does this poem mean?" but "What *might* this poem be about?") We can model for students what it looks and feels like to be open to many interpretive perspectives, and we can value evidence that may well contradict our own favored perspectives as we learn to hold decisions in abeyance until all the evidence is in (e.g., "Hmm. I never thought of this line that way; let me chew on that a bit"). Good teacher-led, student-centered discussions invite a variety of perspectives, and good teachers who lead democratic classroom discussions demonstrate their willingness to pose what-if possibilities and to challenge prevailing assumptions. This, too, is habit of mind that impacts achievement (VanDeWeghe 50).
- Professional study groups can be the training ground for learning about instructional practices that support emotional and intellectual compassion. In the current climate of limited funding for professional development, we can join our colleagues to learn, for example, about how exemplary discussion models built on the principles of compassion positively affect achievement and long-term learning (VanDeWeghe 137).

An Education for the Future

In *Spiritual Evolution: A Scientific Defense of Faith,* George Vaillant discusses "the positive emotions that bind us to other human beings . . . Love, hope, joy, forgiveness, compassion, faith, awe, and gratitude . . . [and] none of the eight are 'all about me'" (4–5). These positive emotions "widen our tolerance, expand our moral compass, and enhance our creativity. They help us to survive in the future" (5). Just as the standards movement of the first decade of this century significantly affected our teaching lives, so too will the new standards. But anything that purports to be relatively "new" has the added benefit of engendering new thinking, such as envisioning a good literacy education as one that prepares students not only for college and career but also for life. EJ

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Recital—English Class

"It's not such a big deal," I say.
"C'mon, everyone has to do it.
Let's get it over with." But she

starts too fast and too softly
so I stop her, say "try again,"
and she looks at me, eyes

praying, *Could I please not?*
When I nod, her classmates,
who tried to beg off too, but

followed through, stay quiet,
save one who blurts "Hey we . . ."
hushed by my look. It's less

a good thing I've done than
a mean one undone, egging
her on to an agony I know,

as with parenting where you
have vowed since childhood
never to speak to your child

as your father spoke to you
until one day the child's there
and his words are there, familiar, yours.

—Michael Milburn

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Teresa Henning

Ethics as a Form of Critical and Rhetorical Inquiry in the Writing Classroom

Two classroom strategies help students use ethical questions to enhance their persuasive writing.

In a recent article, George Hillocks Jr. uses a claim from Alsup et al. that "the ultimate rationale for the teaching of language arts" is "creating a just society whose citizens are critically literate about their world" (279) to make a case for putting critical thinking at the "forefront" of English education (Hillocks 24). Yet, this claim, with its reference to "a just society," could also be easily used to make a case for putting ethics at the forefront of teaching English. Like Hillocks and Alsup, I hold critical thinking in high regard and place it at the heart of my writing classroom, but over the years, I have come to closely align that critical thinking with ethics; ethics is an important form of critical and rhetorical inquiry that can and should have a prominent place in the writing classroom.

Defining Ethics as a Mode of Inquiry

To define ethics as a mode of inquiry, it is first important to consider how ethics relates to critical thinking. Put simply, ethical inquiry is one type of inquiry required to think critically. To observe this connection between ethics and critical thinking, it is helpful to use the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) definition of critical thinking as "a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion." Further, AAC&U notes that an understanding of context, which it defines as "the historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or circumstantial settings or conditions that influence and complicate the consideration of any issues, ideas, artifacts, and events," is an important aspect of such critical thinking. In other words, if we engage students in the process of identifying values and relating them to a specific situation, such as a rhetorical situation, we are engaging students in both critical thinking and ethical inquiry.

A connection between critical thinking and ethics is only possible, however, when ethics is defined not as a static list of rules but as a "mode of questioning," a phrase both James E. Porter (218) and Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan M. Hunter (4) use. Writing teachers recognize the limits of static, rule-based advice for learners. We know that while our students may long for recipe-like rules for writing, good writing requires a thoughtful flexibility. Similarly, responsible, ethical thinking requires a sophisticated understanding of ethics beyond simply a set of rules. As a mode of inquiry, ethics invites teachers, students, and scholars to consider: Who is responsible? For what is one responsible and to whom? Using ethics as mode of inquiry focuses our attention not only on rules but also on contexts and relationships, which are vitally important aspects of work in English education.

What Writing Teachers Need to Know about Ethics and Writing

To engage students in ethical inquiry during the writing process, teachers must have some understanding of where to start. Work in the teaching of technical writing and ethics can be of some help here. Historically, ethics has held a more prominent place in technical writing than other kinds of writ-

ing because technical writing almost always leads to action in the world. As such, issues of responsibility and safety are more likely to be raised by this kind of writing.[1] Richard Johnson-Sheehan in *Technical Communication Today* acknowledges the significance of ethics in technical writing when he notes that writers should consider where ethical values come from by directing their inquiry to these three, overlapping areas:

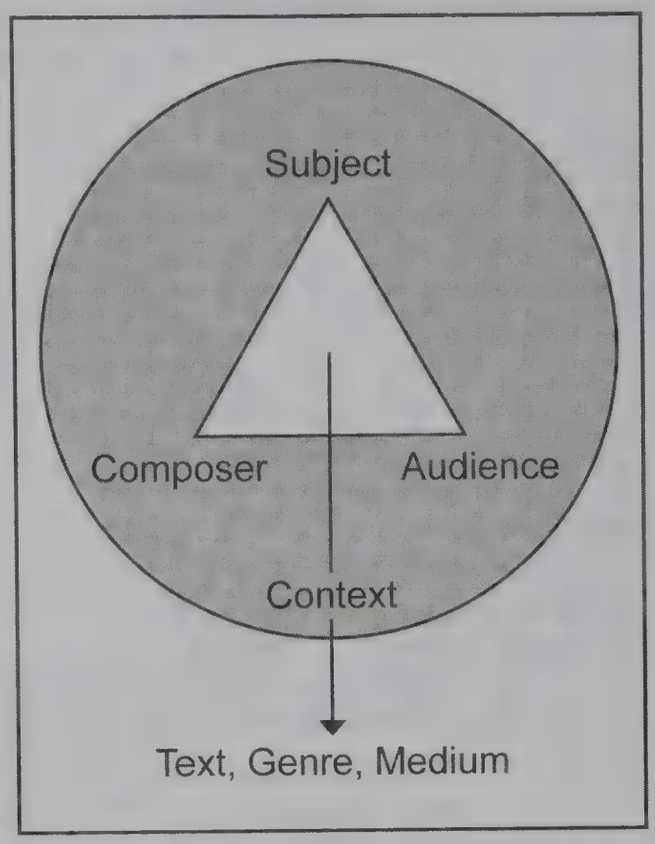
1. "**personal ethics,**" which are defined as "values derived from family, culture and faith" (Johnson-Sheehan 96);
2. "**social ethics,**" which are defined as "values derived from constitutional, legal, utilitarian, and caring sources" (96); and
3. "**conservation ethics,**" which are defined as "values that protect and preserve the ecosystem in which we live" (96).

Of these three areas of inquiry, Johnson-Sheehan's **social ethics** category is the most complicated and is divided into four smaller categories: **rights, justice, utility,** and **care**. **Rights** in the United States refer to "civil and constitutional" rights that citizens have in common (98), while **justice** refers to "laws, corporate policies," and institutional policies that citizens and/or members of an organization have in common (98). **Utility** refers to the ethical principle of doing what is the "greatest good" (98) for the "greatest number of people" (97), while **care** refers to concern for others with whom we relate such as family and friends (97).

Johnson-Sheehan suggests that when faced with an ethical dilemma, which he defines as a situation in which none of the choices are good (92), his readers can decide what to do by interrogating each choice with his four categories of ethical inquiry (96). Further, these questions can be used in a team setting to rationally guide discussions regarding an ethical dilemma.

So far this article has made a case for using Johnson-Sheehan's ethical categories to guide ethical inquiry. To consider how these lines of inquiry relate to writing requires complicating Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation, which reminds us that any communication situation involves an audience, subject, composer, and context. A recent poster in *English Journal* (republished from *College Composition and Communication*) depicts the rhetorical situation by placing the communication triangle of the composer, subject, context, and audience within a circle of language (see fig. 1).

FIGURE 1. Lloyd Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation.



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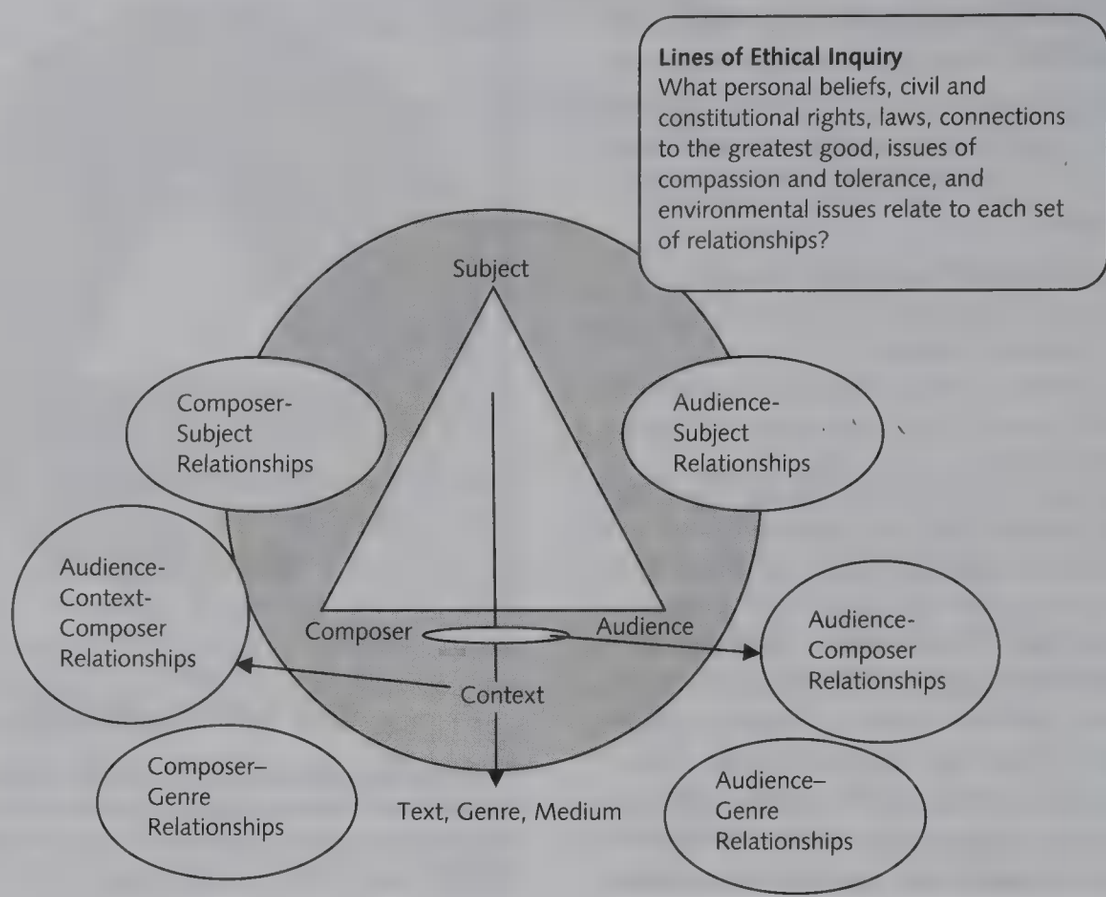
One can usefully complicate this diagram by adding the relationships between and among the individual elements of the triangle (see fig. 2). For instance, one can consider what relationship the audience and composer share or what relationship the audience shares with the subject of the composition. Once we begin considering the relationships between and among terms in the rhetorical situation, we open up the act of communication to ethical inquiry because relationships entail responsibility. The callout box in Figure 2, "Lines of Ethical Inquiry," is an attempt to encapsulate the possible ethical questions one can ask about the relationships present in any act of communication.

Once we begin considering the relationships between and among terms in the rhetorical situation, we open up the act of communication to ethical inquiry because relationships entail responsibility.

FIGURE 2. Visual Representation Revising Lloyd Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation for Ethical Inquiry



Adapted from "Rhetorical Situation: A Poster." *College Composition and Communication* 61.3 (2010): 611. Reprinted by permission in *English Journal* 99.6 (2010): 17.

When should writers pursue ethical inquiry as a part of the analysis they engage in when they consider their rhetorical situation? For most writers, it probably does not make sense to engage in thorough ethical inquiry every time they compose. However, there are times when engaging in ethical inquiry can be a valuable aspect of invention for writers. For instance, when composing a piece of persuasion urging action on a sensitive issue that has the potential to harm others, it is crucial for writers to consider the audience's ethical relationship to the topic. Doing so may even change the writer's view on the issue and lead to a more persuasive piece. Or, when selecting a topic for a personal essay, it might be important for writers to consider the ethical relationships both they and their audiences have with the subject.

In sum, it is most appropriate to conduct ethical inquiry as a part of rhetorical analysis when someone in the writer's rhetorical situation, including the writer, has the potential to be negatively affected by the act of communication.

Two Strategies for the Classroom

To explain more fully how ethics may function as critical, rhetorical inquiry, I will describe two strategies that I use: an ethical inventory and an ethical question star. I use these strategies as prewriting after students have established their topic and audience and have begun exploring their rhetorical situation during a persuasive composition unit where students are required to find a specific, local problem about which they have some knowledge and write a composition in a genre of their choice (typically a letter or an essay) in which they persuade an audience to take some action to solve the problem.

It is important that the problem be local and specific, so the student writer can actually suggest some useful action in the situation. For instance,

one student wrote a letter to his student council about trash generated during the high school's homecoming football game. He noticed that on the Monday after the game the football field was strewn with trash. After some investigation, he discovered that the full, topless garbage cans had been blown over during the weekend's wind storm. The school's maintenance team spent Monday morning picking up trash. In his letter to the student council, the writer recommended that as their next service project the council generate funds to buy ten trash cans with lids for use at high-traffic events such as the homecoming celebration.

The Ethical Inventory Heuristic

I have used the ethical inventory, essentially a list of questions (see fig. 3), in two ways. In classes with students who like to talk and discuss well, I write each category of questions, one at a time, on a flip chart. In round-robin fashion, the students share responses to the category's questions. This process is repeated for each of the six categories. In other classes, students form teams of four and write answers to the six categories on flip-chart paper. The teams then report out to the class a summary of their top three values. Once the process, whether completed as a whole class or in teams, is done, the flip paper is hung on the classroom walls for the next steps in the process. Sometimes, working through the inventory questions can take a full 50-minute class period, and sometimes it can be completed well in 30 minutes, so I always come prepared with the next step, which is to use the values generated to explore a rhetorical situation with the ethical question star.

The Ethical Question Star

Once students have developed a set of values, they are ready to use the ethical question star to explore a rhetorical situation. In my classes, this star is used twice (see figs. 4 and 5). The class uses it to explore the same rhetorical situation together, and then class members use it again to explore their individual rhetorical situations. To get ready to use the star, I first hang up the flip-chart papers with ethical values on the walls in the classroom. The class and I refer to these papers if we get stuck answering a question on the star. The whole class practices using the star on the same rhetorical situation.

I find that the rhetorical situation of the high school student who wrote to the student council about trash on the football field works well for practicing the star, as the class can relate to the rhetorical situation. I ask the students to imagine that they have to use the field for football, band, or track practice. I then describe to them what happened to the field and why. I also invite them to imagine that they are going to write a letter to their student council to urge them to do something about the problem. Using that situation, we then work through every question on the star. Before starting the whole-class discussion, I make sure everyone has a copy of the star. I allow everyone in the class to get up and view the flip-chart papers full of values and write down relevant values on their question star handout. I allow about five to ten minutes for this step. I then lead a whole-class discussion in which we complete the question star together. Figure 4 illustrates what the question star looks like before it is completed. Figure 5 is an example of a question star that a first-year writing class com-

FIGURE 3. Ethical Inventory Questions as They Connect to Johnson-Sheehan's Ethical Categories

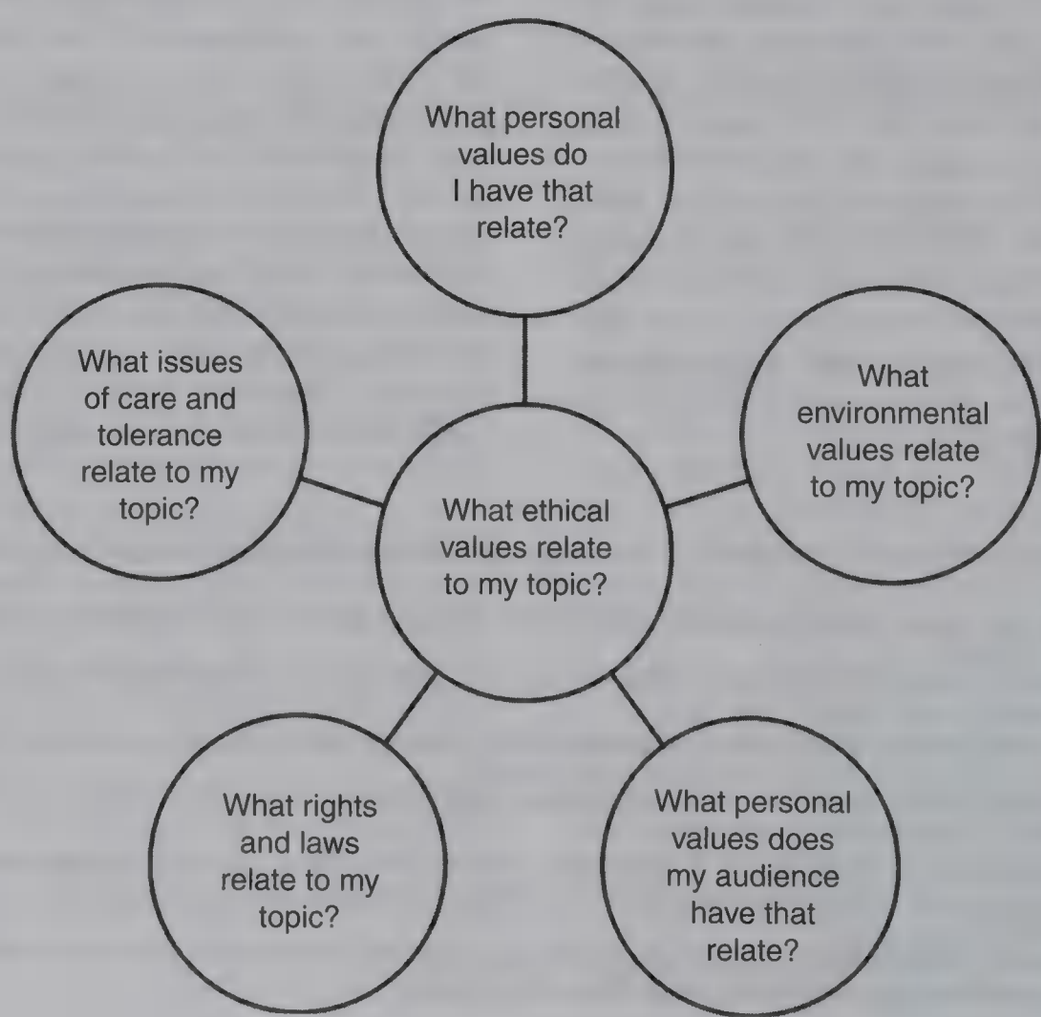
1. **Discovering values related to personal ethics:** What makes for a good person? Neighbor? Friend? Parent? Sibling?
2. **Discovering values related to social ethics of care:** How do the people in the first question show that they care for one another?
3. **Discovering values related to social utilitarian ethics:** What are some actions people take to make the world a better place? What makes these actions good?
4. **Discovering values related to social policies/rules:** What makes for a good organization? A school? A church? A corporation? A government?
5. **Discovering values related to social rights/laws and rules:** What rights, rules, and laws are important to you as a citizen of the United States? As a member of this school? As a member of your church? As a member of your town?
6. **Discovering values related to conservation:** What do people do to care for the earth, its air and water, and its plants and animals? What makes these actions good?

pleted together in response to the trash-on-the-football-field topic.

Once the class has practiced with the ethical question star and observed how it relates to the ethical inventory that they took, I ask class members to complete a question star for their own rhetorical situations. I typically have students work in pairs, helping each other with their stars. Even with practice, students sometimes get stuck completing the star, so I go around and help the teams. I often invite them to get up and look again at the values hanging on the classroom walls as a way of generating ideas. If students are still stuck after reviewing the values on the classroom walls, I ask guiding questions to help them complete their question stars.

Now that the question stars are complete, the next class periods use strategies that can work for almost any paper. The students have completed some invention (just as they do for other papers). They now need to consider how they can use the work they have generated to begin drafting. To help them see the connection between invention and drafting, we revisit the answers to the ethical question star that we generated about the same topic—in this case, the topic of the trash on the football field. I ask the class, what can the writer do with the completed question star? How would you use it? Some say that they will use the star to do research. Others say the star is an outline for the paper. Yet others say the star has details for paragraphs. I point out that all of their answers are right. I then invite them to pick an idea from the star and use it as a topic sentence for a paragraph that they write with one other student. They read these team-produced paragraphs, and we discuss what we like best from the paragraphs. I list those strengths on the board. I then give all the writers ten minutes of individual writing time to turn something else from the stars into a paragraph for their own papers. Showing writers how they can use the ideas they invent reinforces the ways pre-

FIGURE 4. Ethical Question Star for Exploring a Rhetorical Situation



writing, and in this case ethical inquiry, can be a fruitful part of their writing processes.

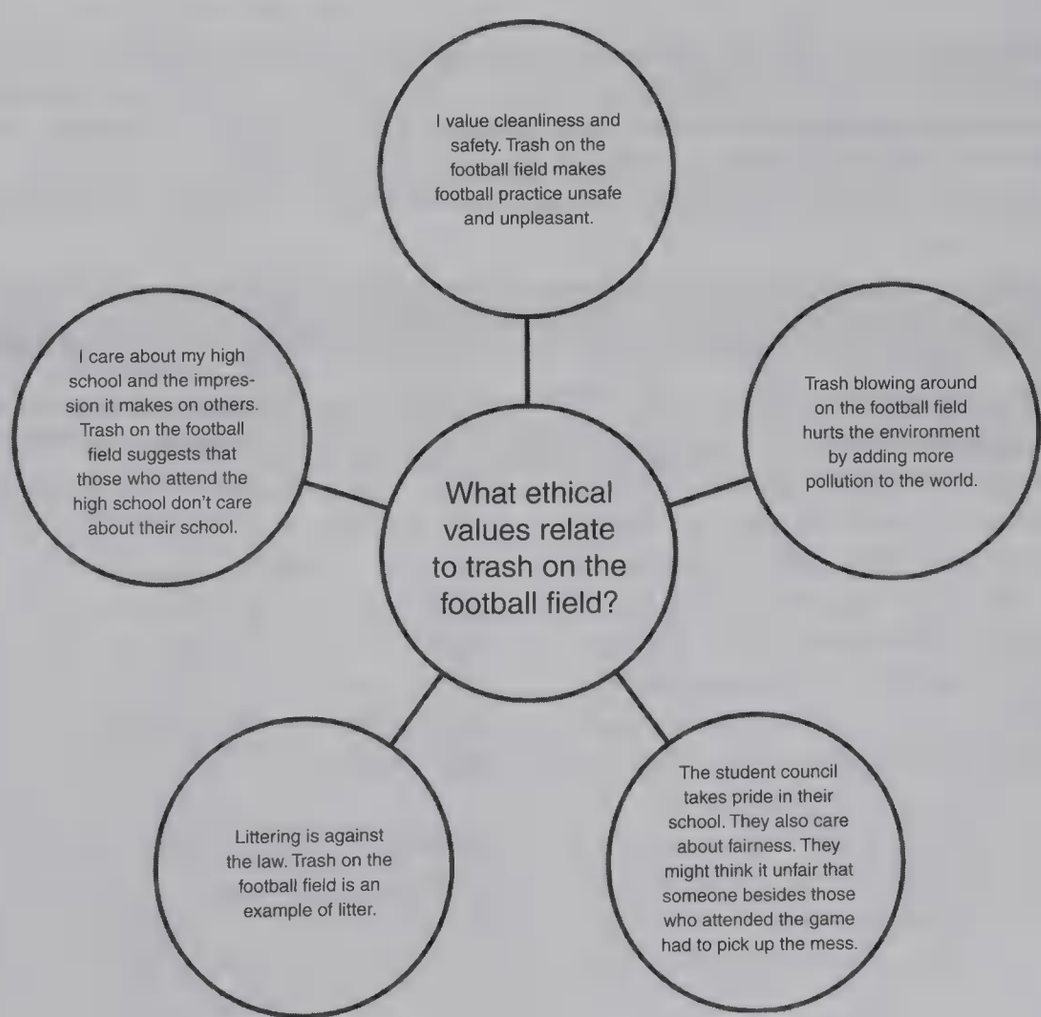
The Importance of Ethical Inquiry in the Writing Classroom

Ethical inquiry is an important form of critical thinking and as such it is an important component of students' cognitive development. The potential ethical inquiry has for writing students can be best understood if we consider Erika Lindemann's claim that "intellectual growth occurs when people are required to exercise high-level thinking . . . relative to their own stage of development" (107). Both the ethical inventory and ethical question star heuristics encourage learners to see themselves as "sources of knowledge," which is the key quality that Marcia B. Baxter Magolda says "transitional knowers" possess (qtd. in Lindemann 103). As such ethical inquiry can begin to move students from Magolda's "absolute knowing" stage, where knowledge is construed as "certain" and obtained from an instructor (Lindemann 103), to a "transitional knowing" state where learners begin to understand their role as a "source of knowledge" (Lindemann 103). The movement from absolute knowing to transitional knowing is a developmental one that occurs as early as students' junior year in high school and as late as their first year of college. As such junior and senior high school writing teachers and first-year college writing teachers can play a fundamental role in supporting and challenging their students as they undertake this important developmental growth.

Ethical inquiry is an important form of critical thinking and as such it is an important component of students' cognitive development.

In addition, ethical inquiry has the potential to enrich writers' processes of invention. For developmental writers who have special difficulty

FIGURE 5. Example of a Completed Ethical Question Star



in creating sufficient, audience-based content for their work, having another angle from which to consider their rhetorical situation is empowering and useful. They often find that they really do have something to communicate and begin to view writing as an act of communication instead of an empty classroom exercise.

Finally, ethical inquiry helps students understand that writing is a form of action and as such can have consequences for themselves and others in the world. I find that students typically get excited about the fact that their work can have real power, and it is important to help them understand that such power has consequences for others. Ultimately, incorporating ethics as critical, rhetorical inquiry can help writers better understand how to use communication to create responsible and caring relationships with others.

Editor's Note

1. For an example of ethics as applied to professional and technical writing, see "Good Writing: The Problem of Ethics" in this issue's "Professional Writing" column, written by Leah A. Zuidema and Jonathan Bush.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Read more about ethics and writing in the ReadWriteThink.org lesson plan, "Developing Persuasive Arguments through Ethical Inquiry: Two Prewriting Strategies," also written by Teresa Henning. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/developing-persuasive-arguments-through-30744.html

Trudi J. Nelson

Assessing Internal Group Processes in Collaborative Assignments

Asking students to work in groups raises practical and ethical questions about assessment. Drawing on a survey of her students, Nelson discusses some of those issues and suggests workable solutions.

As we consider ethics, we find that it may often look like a student issue. It may be discussions of plagiarism, social justice, honesty, bullying, privacy, child labor, free speech, inequity. However, even as we struggle with ways to model ethics or "teach" ethics, we find that our teaching practices may warrant reflection. One of these may be the question of distinguishing between the group and the individual when assessing products done in a group-work setting.

The Purposes of Group Work

First we must clarify that group work has more than one face, more than one purpose, within the classroom. The groups may have *process* as the goal, as seen within discussion formats, or the groups may have a *product* as a goal to show the endpoint of a learning process. Both of these are similar in that they have the constructivist goal of students making meaning together. Collaborative work can be a powerful practice. Whatever the goal, both can encourage higher-order thinking as students grapple with big questions and collaborate to solve problems. Members of a group can build on each other's ideas, brainstorming and developing new tangents. Individuals can question and clarify ideas together, enriching the learning environment.

Groups may be formed with the primary goal of facilitating discussion. As students discuss ideas, question, and tie responses to literature and the world together, meaning is made, re-formed, and expanded. This usually ungraded form of collaboration is vital to the engagement of the classroom; the richness of the discussion can drive interest and inform instruction.

Another purpose of classroom groups is the creation of a product: a presentation, a poster, a utilization of technology or drama, a speech, a report, or anything else that is generated by the teacher or by the group members to meet the purpose of the assignment. An effective assignment for a collaborative group will encourage students to design, plan, and create a project bigger than any one of the students could create alone.

It is in this context that my discussion of ethics here is based: the single product on which all group participants are working. In this type of group work, it is common for group members to each receive the same grade based on the quality of the product.

I see students enjoying the social interaction for learning; I hear comments from students about how they enjoy talking within groups about the content, as many of them are hesitant to take the risk to speak in the whole-class setting. But I also hear the challenges that arise when students work in groups. I have overheard frustrated students saying comments such as, "I don't like group projects. There's always a slacker in the group who doesn't do anything and still gets the good grade."

These student comments, often delivered with frustration and emotion, should encourage teachers to be clear in their own minds about the purposes for their group assignments and how they will assess the students' efforts.

What a Group May Look Like

Imagine this scenario: The teacher wants the students to show understanding of a lesson, perhaps of a particular scene from *Hamlet* or of forms of propaganda. The teacher either arranges groups in some predesigned formation or the teacher allows the students to choose their own groups. If the groups are made according to the teacher's choice, they will probably contain some elements of heterogeneous grouping, with both genders represented as well as diversity of learners within the group. The diversity may be by considering students' attributes, such as ability, learning styles, personality, and students' group-work skills, such as leadership, cultural background, and background knowledge.

In the best cases, groups present a respectable product and all group members gain significant learning from the experience. However, in other cases, group members who didn't pull their weight may have received the same grade as the members who took more responsibility for the task.

In this type of grouping, students will all contribute to the group, but their effort and skill will vary. Possibly some members of the groups kick back, knowing that the grade is a group grade, or perhaps they don't value grades all that much anyway. For other members of the groups, the grade matters a great deal. When high-achieving students see something not being done well (or at all), they are likely to take on the additional tasks rather than risk getting a lower grade. There is even the possibility that overachievers in the groups will discourage full participation of others, fearing a lackluster group product.

In the best cases, groups present a respectable product and all group members gain significant learning from the experience. However, in other cases, group members who didn't pull their weight may have received the same grade as the members who took more responsibility for the task.

What Students Say

As there is limited research available on how students feel about group work, I conducted a survey. When I surveyed 30 college junior education majors (33 students were invited to participate), 29 of the 30 (96.6%) reported having "been in a group where a group member did not participate equally but received the same grade as all group members." One responded as unsure. Twenty-nine of the 30 (96.6%) also reported having "done more than your share so that a group grade (preparing a product or presentation) would not be lowered when one or more group members did not participate equally," with one again responding as unsure.

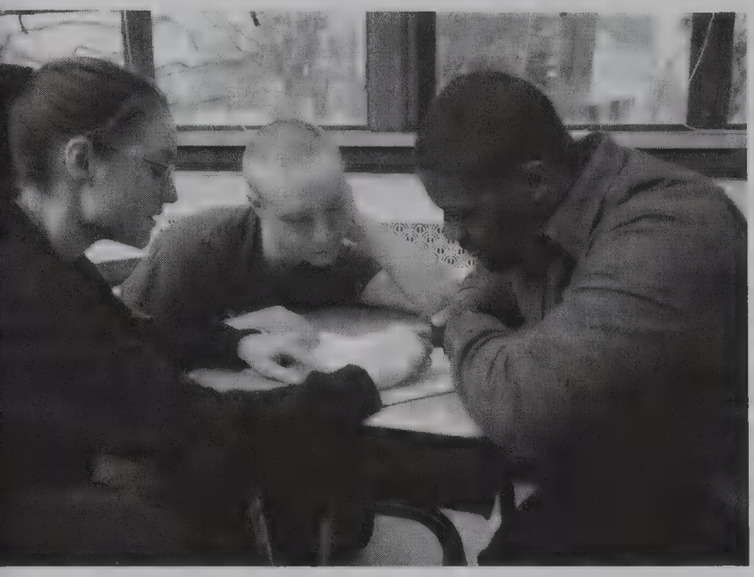
Yanbin Tu and Min Lu also surveyed students about group work, asking "if each team member's contribution is not equal do you think it is fair that everyone gets the same grade in your team?" Seventy-seven percent believed it to be unfair. Broken down, 23% felt it was fair, 30% thought it was not fair but acceptable, and 47% thought it was neither fair nor acceptable (202).

When my survey asked about students' perceptions of the importance of the teacher giving individual students "feedback on group work participation," 18 deemed it extremely important, eight said important, three said of some importance, and one did not respond. However, when asked about the importance of the teacher giving individual students feedback if a group member who did not participate "will pass a class because of the group product/presentation," then the level of perceived importance increased, with all 30 responding that the feedback was important (7) or extremely important (23). These findings show that my students believe that when a group assignment has a major impact on the final course grade, teachers should base some of the grade for the group assignment on the level of participation of each group member.

How Can We Assess Group Work?

How can we more ethically determine individual efforts in a group project?

First, we must not discount the value of the product as a significant external result of important and complex internal processes. Francis Lopez-Real and Yin-Ping Rita Chan discuss the distinct aspects of a group project, and one of these is the actual content of the product, usually assessed by the teacher. Other elements to be assessed include the presentation of the product, assessed by the teacher and students, and the internal processes of the collaborative work within the group (69).



Thompson-McClellan Photography

The Teacher as Facilitator of Internal Group Processes

A teacher can play an explicit role in setting up groups for successful processes. Teachers can establish specific expectations through a rubric and/or through a group protocol or contract. New Tech Network, an association of project-based learning schools, includes student group contracts that lay out responsibilities, tasks, and protocols for each project. (See http://www.newtechnetwork.org.) These are determined by the students as they define the product that will meet the rubric guidelines. These contracts also include the steps for "firing" group members, including giving warnings and steps at which a teacher becomes involved. Fired group members become responsible for the project individually.

This is similar to the Yellow and Red Card Method, reported in the second half of "A Survey of Methods of Deriving Individual Grades from Group Assessments" by Mark Lejk and Michael Wyvill, in which a group member would receive a yellow card as a warning of shirking responsibility. If the behavior continued, the red card would be issued, which severed the ties of the individual to the group, allowing the group to not be responsible for the part of the project that individual was doing.

Teachers can develop rubrics that include individual contribution within groups. This should be clearly defined and measurable. One example would be that each group member, when asked by the instructor, will be able to tell what he or she is doing and how it fits the group goal and be able to tell what each member of the group is currently working on. This raises each group member to a level of stakeholder, more clearly accountable to the group and more clearly accountable for an individual grade. Thom Markham, John Larmer, and Jason Ravitz of the Buck Institute suggest establishing guidelines such as time limits, benchmarks, or goal sheets as a way to assist students in managing group work and individual work within the group effectively (98).

Teachers who facilitate positive group processes successfully will be able to determine if students are following protocols and when they need assistance in following those protocols. When groups seem to need help, the teacher facilitator can ask questions to monitor involvement of individual group members or, when groups seem to need help, the teacher can ask questions to guide them back to a productive path.

Students as Assessors of Internal Group Processes

The second option for establishing positive internal group processes in collaborative assignments is for the students to take some responsibility for establishing and assessing group members' efforts. Students can do this by setting or contracting their own group norms or protocols before starting the project and assessing individual participation during and after the project. Students could also be given the chance to assess each other's efforts after the project even if group contracts are not used. Self-assessment could also play a valuable role, as students could be instructed to include themselves on assessments. All assessments discussed are individually written.

Teachers can develop rubrics that include individual contribution within groups. This should be clearly defined and measurable.

Markham, Larmer, and Ravitz suggest an assessment of group participation that is more general. The teacher would choose "all members," "most members," "some members," "few members," or "not applicable" for each of a number of statements. Some examples would be "Begin work promptly . . . ," "Have relevant conversations . . . ," "Ask clarifying questions . . . ," or "Share responsi-

bilities . . ." (119). Students also have the opportunity for a self-assessment of group contribution in this format (120).

Examples of Student Assessments

I have used three different types of assessment after group projects for anonymous student assessment of individual efforts. I gave students these assessment instruments on completion of a group presentation.

The first assessment is numerical. Students are given a prime number to divide among group members, using no fractions or decimals. I use a prime number purposely as it forces students to do more than just divide all the points equally. When using prime numbers, someone has to receive more or fewer points. It also allows me to give the same prime number to all groups even if there are different numbers in the groups. Students are also instructed to explain why they gave the points they did—why more points, why fewer points. For example, a group of three members could be given 17 points to each divide. Joe gives five points each to Sarah and to himself, noting that they each fulfilled their tasks by actively researching, but gives Bridget seven points for actively researching and taking a leadership role. Sarah gives herself five points for researching but gives Joe six with credit for putting the presentation slides together and gives Bridget six for organization skills. Bridget gives herself six points for taking the lead, gives Joe six for the slides and research, and gives Sarah five for good research.

A student once gave high points to another group member because she did all the typing for a PowerPoint presentation and only a few points to himself because he only did the research. I would not have learned this had I not asked the students for their feedback on internal group processes.

I have used this student feedback in several ways. Sometimes I figure out the average and assume that students should be within a certain range of that, and if one or more students aren't in that range I know I must investigate further. I find it just as effective, however, to watch for trends. If I see one group member consistently scoring well below or well above average, I examine the students' feedback more closely. This feedback has also helped me learn more about the kinds of group work that students value, and sometimes I am surprised by what I learn. A student once gave high points to another group member because she did all the typing for a PowerPoint presentation and only a few points to himself because he only did the research. That was a surprising insight that I now discuss regularly with students. I would not have learned this had I not asked the students for their feedback on internal group processes.

A second method for collecting student feedback on internal group processes uses character roles from fiction. For example, I've used the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." I gave each character traits that might be seen in a group effort, such as leadership, work ethic, verbal input, or working as a unit. As an example, Papa Bear seemed to be a large-sized character so a Papa Bear in group work may be a "large" role also, taking on leadership. In some story versions, Mama Bear made that porridge; in group work, a Mama Bear showed a strong work ethic. Baby Bear was rather loud but was still part of the family; in group work, this person may have been talkative (maybe even a little distracting) but still worked as part of the group (the family). Goldilocks was part of the story but wasn't part of the family. In group work, a Goldilocks wasn't a strong collaborator and may have asked to just be given a part of the project to be completed independently from the group. In this assessment, students assign each group member to a role from the folktale and explain why. More than one group member can be assigned each folktale role, so there may be three members who were Baby Bears. Students who preferred this fiction-inspired method enjoyed being able to rate members fairly equally, without ranking them, and they felt it gave an added dimension to the thought process.

I also surveyed students about these two forms of collecting student feedback. Students commented that both methods helped clarify thinking about the roles that members played within the groups. In addition, 16 of the 30 students I surveyed reported that they found the mathematical format easier; six found the two equally easy. Twelve students believed that the mathematical format gave a more accurate picture (with six believing the two were equally accurate). Reasons some students preferred the mathematical method included that the student was used to a point system and that "the

FIGURE 1. Continuum Assessment for Group Work

Group _____ Your name _____

Regularly unengaged with group and/or process	Present mentally/ paying attention	Highly engaged throughout process
Worked, but showed no opinions or leadership	Periodically offered leadership; contributed ideas	Contributed ideas regularly
Absent physically	Present physically and used time well	Present at all work sessions and maximized all work time to advance project
Occasionally showed understanding or only on one aspect of project	Showed general understanding of topic	Contributed to discussion of topic at every level
Did not encourage others or discouraged	Periodically offered encouragement to others	Consistently encouraged all others

uneven points forced me to be completely honest and not just *nice.*"

A third option for collecting student feedback on internal group processes is to use a continuum for all group members (see fig. 1). A continuum allows the assessor to list each of the group members, grouping or separating them on the continuum as much as desired. Each continuum line across the paper focuses on one aspect of working well collaboratively. For example, one line deals with support and encouragement for other group members. The far left end is for a group member who did not encourage or discouraged others in the group, the center (rather like a "meets expectations") is for others who were periodically encouraged, with the far right end being for the role of consistent encourager. Each group member may fill this out. Kristi may put all group members tightly together between the periodically and consistently encouraged and note that she felt that all group members were equal in supporting each other. Nanette may scatter group names along the line between periodic to consistent and note that Jan always encouraged ideas. Asking for this type of feedback also reinforces some of the positive personal and communication skills within group work that would be similar to those desired in the job force. Whereas the numeric and character role feedback encourages individuality, the continuum is perhaps easiest for students to give similar scoring to all group members, which may be both a plus and a minus. The scorer has the opportunity to score group members similarly, which equally balanced groups appreciate. However, the continuum may also make it easy to give everyone a common score, whether earned or not, which is not helpful for assessment. Students reported on the survey that the continuum method for collecting feedback gave them a fair way to describe the participation of group members.

Where to Go from Here?

Every teacher retains the authority for managing group work and its assessment. Students who comment on common group grades are intense in their comments, and I believe that practices that give rise to such a high level of emotion should be continuously examined. While I've provided some directions in this article, we must continue to ask questions of our own teaching practices: As we strive for learner-centered classroom environments, how can we best facilitate learning? How can we maintain accountability for learning? How can we utilize the powerful possibilities in learning and teaching ethically?

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

For those who find it a challenge to assess group work fairly, the ReadWriteThink.org lesson plan "Active Reading through Self-Assessment: The Student-Made Quiz" presents an option. The lesson plan encourages students to comprehend their reading through inquiry and collaboration. Students choose important quotations from the text and work in groups to formulate "quiz" questions that their peers will answer. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/active-reading-through-self-30702.html

Testimony

I imagined you waiting,
broken-wristed and black-eyed,
as I hovered by the doorway,
willing my expression neutral.

When I finally entered
I wanted to sit near you,
to rest my hands on your shoulders
and say, "Finished with your essay?"

But this is not my classroom,
and I cannot see your eyes
as the judge looks to me to tell
the whole truth without sentiment:

Your mother left you homeless.
You set the school on fire.

—Tasha Graff

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Tasha Graff lives and teaches public high school on the coast of Maine. She is currently earning a master's degree through the Bread Loaf School of English. Email her at tasha.graff@gmail.com.

Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Kelly Sassi

An Ethical Dilemma: Talking about Plagiarism and Academic Integrity in the Digital Age

An open, in-depth discussion about academic dishonesty may help students (and teachers) develop ethical approaches to scholarship. Real classroom talk is closely examined and suggestions for discussing plagiarism are offered.

It is every English teacher's dream turned nightmare. One evening after a long day at school, you begin to read an argumentative essay with prose that sings. You put your marking pen down and smile with satisfaction. This particular student has come a long way since her first draft, and you are proud of the tangible evidence of your effective instruction. However, as you continue to read, you begin to experience a creeping sensation of déjà vu. You've read this passage before. A quick Internet search reveals that the passage that you were so riveted by is not the work of your student. Most of it originally appeared in the *New York Times* editorial section two weeks before. A few words have been changed, but most of it looks like blatant copying. Suspicion and dread turn to anger, a sense of betrayal, and the inevitability of confronting the wayward student. You begin to gather your evidence, anticipating (and dreading) the meeting ahead.

The next day, you ask your student to remain after class. You first inquire about her composing process, generating your questions from statements found in her essay's cover letter. Then, you calmly present the evidence of her breach of academic integrity—the clipping from the *Times* and the corresponding passage in the essay, highlighted. The student reads the clipping, glances at the passage, and then reacts with genuine surprise. The teen purportedly had no idea that copying the passage was a breach of ethics, and she did not know that it came from the esteemed *New York Times*. The paragraph was found in the comments section of a popular blog, posted by "Anonymous." Although the student did not know how to properly cite the passage, she sincerely believed that the passage provided credible evidence for her central claims, and she made the ill-fated decision to include it.

You have no choice. According to school policy, as well as your own personal convictions as an educator, you must assign the student a failing grade for this major assignment. She leaves your classroom, infuriated. You watch the wayward adolescent go, feeling as if young people today just don't have as much integrity as they did in the past.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity in a Digital Age

This fictional scenario provides one window into the challenges of teaching, talking about, and ultimately enforcing policies about plagiarism and academic integrity in the high school English classrooms of the digital age. Today, many of our students not only access the Internet through desktop and laptop computers at home or at school but also have copious amounts of information at their fingertips via portable devices (e.g., iPods, iPads, netbooks, smartphones). While some teachers welcome the proliferation of portable technologies and easy wireless Internet access, and look for ways to integrate digital literacy and writing into their classrooms, many of us dread the prospect of dealing with more academic dishonesty in student work because of the ease with which it can be done (P. L. Thomas). Overwhelmed, we turn to Google and plagiarism detection services such as TurnItIn .com and Safe Assign, hoping to stop the cheating

and copying that have allegedly "reached epidemic proportions" in student writing (Purdy). However, there are issues of intellectual property involved in using such sites—once a student uploads his or her paper, it becomes part of the database used to check for future plagiarism cases. The intellectual property caucus of the Conference on College Composition and Communication generally advises against the use of plagiarism detection services as a policing tool. After all, we are teachers, not police, so many of us dutifully teach our students how to cite sources, then are disheartened when we must enforce harsh penalties for those students who are unwilling (or don't know how) to give credit where credit is due.

The digital intimacy cultivated in virtual communities may conflict with those of academic English.

The consequences of plagiarism are what Rebecca Moore Howard famously characterized as the "academic death penalty." Margaret Price further characterizes the tone of plagiarism policies in many of our writing classrooms as "gotcha!" pedagogy. Price observes that "plagiarism is not only a phenomenon that *can* be mastered by students new to academic writing, such policies announce, it *must* be mastered" (89; italics added). The consequences for even unwitting student plagiarists are often severe, ranging from failing grades on assignments to expulsion from a course or even a school.

Students and scholars are expected to cite all instances of others' ideas and creativity in their work, but teachers—and this might bear further exploration—are not expected to cite the contributions of others in our teaching materials. The rules and norms of one community or group may be distinct from those of another (Swales). In this way, perhaps our students are not unlike us. As digital natives, some students may be engaged in digital writing in contexts where norms of integrity are quite different from those assumed by classroom teachers (Prensky). The adolescents in our classrooms, many of whom were born just as the World Wide Web exploded (or later), regularly use social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, as well as blogs, wikis, instant messaging, texting, and YouTube. Before they were old enough for a Facebook account, many elementary school–age children were initiated into collaborative multimodal composing with the debut of the Nintendo DSi in April 2009, which allowed instant sharing of Flipnotes and other digital compositions all over the world. Today's children and young adults use these forms of communication to engage in textual and visual production that is collaborative, patched together with pastiche and allusions, and shared in what has been characterized as environments of *digital intimacy* (Thompson). Although both digital literacy and digital intimacy can be used to scaffold student learning of written genres that are privileged in schools, the virtual communities where these projects are shaped have their own ever-evolving rules, norms, and assumptions about integrity and what constitutes appropriate authorship. For example, on many fanfiction sites, participants are using the characters, plot, symbols, etc. of a well-known work, but these authors are not immune to charges of plagiarism. The digital intimacy cultivated in virtual communities may conflict with those of academic English. Traditional writing tasks, such as timed, high-stakes writing tests, put tremendous pressure on students to perform. Left unexamined, conflicts between the intellectual property conventions of traditional forms of writing and highly social, multimodal compositions boil over into difficult conversations. Therefore, talking and teaching about academic integrity in high school English classrooms may lead to an ethical dilemma—a dilemma in need of an effective resolution.

Jane's Ethical Dilemma: Talking about Plagiarism with Students

Ebony, the first author of this article, first met Jane Bradshaw while teaching ninth grade at a new school. At the time, Ebony's teaching practices were being researched by a doctoral student, Kelly, the second author of this article (Sassi and Thomas). After the study was concluded, Kelly and Ebony wrote about how they resolved ethical dilemmas that arose during the teaching of multicultural literature through the intervention of a "privilege walk" (Sassi and Thomas). Two years later, Ebony returned to Rainfield High School to conduct her own dissertation research on ethical dilemmas that other English teachers might face (Thomas). To find out what kinds of topics teachers were hav-

ing difficulty talking about with their students, she convened a series of professional development workshops for ninth- and tenth-grade English teachers. Teachers were invited to learn about discourse analysis while recording the talk in one of their classes for a month. One of the primary texts used was Lesley A. Rex and Laura Schiller's *Using Discourse Analysis to Improve Classroom Interaction,* which provided a framework for teachers interested in investigating their own discourse. Each teacher in the group then selected a conflict-laden moment to analyze, and then reflected on what they learned.

All of the teachers had different kinds of dilemmas that they were wrestling with in their classrooms. One of Ebony's colleagues who wrestled most with how to talk with her students about plagiarism was Jane Bradshaw. Jane's dilemma that she talked about during the workshops was, *How do you negotiate classroom norms with students who choose to define ethics, originality, and plagiarism very differently than you do?* Her students were devising increasingly creative ways to cheat on quizzes and papers. Jane responded to this initially by remaining firm about her values and convictions about academic integrity in the English classroom, and she was discouraged that even after an initial conversation surfacing her concerns, students continued to justify their behaviors and choices. She was clearly frustrated with the increase in academic dishonesty and voiced her frustrations in our workshops, but she was not sure about how to proceed other than to enforce consequences.

Jane's ethical dilemma is a common one among English teachers. English class is the site where secondary students are first introduced to the humanities. As such, it has the humanistic goal of creating a citizen who is not only literate but also ethical and cosmopolitan (Alsup et al.). Through our teaching of literature and writing, we also teach the ethical values of our society. As such, what is taught in English classrooms and how it is taught is highly contested and often politicized. Australian language and literacy educators Frances Christie and Mary Macken-Horarik propose that the reason why English can be so contested is because the main goal for our students is the acquisition of an acceptable *shared ethical position.* Students not only demonstrate their proficiency in English studies through their knowledge of language, literature, and writing but also through demonstrating that one shares and has internalized prevailing social and cultural norms (Christie and Macken-Horarik). One of these norms is that of academic integrity, which consists of sole authorship and attributing all sources that contribute to a written work.

When teachers like Jane are attempting to establish a shared ethical position, ideological dilemmas are often a source of conflict. Yet through talking about points of difference, tension, and conflict, often teachers and students are able to find common ground. Some teachers even learn to welcome conflict as generative for critical teaching and learning (Dakin; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, and Tejeda; Souto-Manning).

As Ebony listened to Jane share about her students' academic dishonesty during the discourse workshops, she began to consider whether Jane and her students were on the same page about what terms such as *plagiarism* and *academic integrity* meant. From her previous experiences teaching at Rainfield and her teacher research with Kelly, she knew that effective cross-cultural and cross-contextual communication was complex at this increasingly diverse school. To that end, she suggested that Jane have a brief conversation with her students about how they were thinking about these ideas. Ebony would record and transcribe the conversation, and together she and Jane would then analyze the ways that students were talking about plagiarism and academic integrity. Jane agreed and graciously allowed Ebony to visit her ninth-grade honors/pre-AP classroom as a participant and observer. Students read the last scene of act 2 of *Romeo and Juliet,* and then Jane shifted into talking about plagiarism.

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Jane opened the discussion by explaining what they would be talking about and why it was important both now and in the future:

> **Jane:** OK, good. *(pauses)* I know that this comes to mind for me a lot, and I've mentioned it a couple of times already this year, but I think that it's a good time to mention

it again. Because tomorrow we're having a quiz on act 3. I've told you [academic dishonesty] has been an extra concern to me this year for my ninth graders. One thing that's important to reinforce . . . is the whole idea of how you're shaping your future . . . how you're shaping the person that you want to be. Sometimes, there might be a difference in opinion about *what exactly is academic dishonesty.* So when I say that term, what do you think of?

Jane set up the talk by shifting the focus from the literature under study to the ethics that her students needed to learn. They needed to consider how they were "shaping their future" and "the person that you want to be" when they were engaged in academic dishonesty. She expressed to them that it is "an extra concern to me this year for my ninth graders," reinforcing her ethic of care in the classroom. She also showed that she valued her students' opinions by asking them what they thought about plagiarizing and cheating on assignments.

When the discussion turned to consideration of plagiarism, the conversation shifted from consequences *for* academic dishonesty to teaching *about* academic integrity.

At first, students were reluctant to speak. The classroom atmosphere and students' body language seemed tense. After the first few minutes, students began to speak more freely. Below, we categorize some of the ways that Jane and her students talked about academic integrity.

How Jane's Students Defined Academic Dishonesty

Some of the terms generated during Jane's discussion included *texting during tests, plagiarism,* and *copying.* We use these terms to categorize what students said because it is important to not only teach students about policies and provide examples of citations but to also understand their preconceived notions about what constitutes academic integrity.

Texting during Tests

Elise: Texting during tests. That's cheating.

Jane: Texting during tests . . . cheating is another way of saying academic dishonesty. I'm talking about not cheating on your income tax, but rather cheating . . . throughout your education.

Jane redefined her student's label of "cheating" with the more scholarly term *academic dishonesty.* She gave the term more weight by describing academic dishonesty in the same vein as cheating the IRS. Her "but rather" positioned cheating "throughout your education" as the equivalent to (or even greater than) the felony of tax evasion. Her choice of words emphasized the gravity of texting *anything* during a test for students who may not have understood that their usual digital literate practice was not just a minor crime but also a serious breach of academic integrity.

Plagiarism

Jane: Plagiarism? Can you tell us a little more about what that is?

Mia: It's like . . . instead of doing your own thing, you go and get someone else's off the Internet or something?

Jane: Right! It's fairly easy these days for teachers to check on that. There are some software packages, but in addition to that, there are other really quick ways to type in a phrase, you know. Teachers are pretty good at noticing the way that students express themselves. . . . Another good point is that . . . yes, if it's a direct quotation, you need to cite that source, but . . . any kind of paraphrase . . . you still have to cite the source.

When the discussion turned to consideration of plagiarism, the conversation shifted from consequences *for* academic dishonesty to teaching *about* academic integrity. Jane first alluded to software programs that detect plagiarism, then began to chat about what kinds of information need attribution. This points to Jane's interest in punishing her students but also teaching them the conventions of the field.

Copying

Aidan: Copying?

Jane: Copying. So kind of looking at someone else's answers during a test. But what about copying, like study guides, if it's not,

like, a group project or something like that? Does that . . . is that what you're thinking?

Aidan: It's . . . *still cheating.*

Jane: It's cheating in what way?

Aidan: Um, you're not doing it yourself, so you're cheating yourself.

Jane: It's all about setting our own standards . . . the worst thing in the world is to cheat ourselves.

Jane distinguished between two different kinds of "copying." The first kind was copying answers from someone else's test. The second was copying verbatim from study guides and other materials, but a qualification was added—"a group project or something like that." This pointed to one category of assignment where students *could* engage in what in other contexts might be considered copying. Although this distinction was not explicitly stated, Jane advises students to "set their own standards" so that they will not "cheat" themselves.

How Jane's Students Rationalized Academic Dishonesty

As the conversation progressed, Jane's students began to rationalize their choices about whether or not to engage in what their teacher believed was academic dishonesty. One of Jane's major concerns was that information about her literature quizzes was being provided from students who had already taken her class.

The conversation continued for several more minutes. Students repeatedly drew distinctions between knowledge of test content and degree of difficulty, and providing actual questions and prompts. Although Jane insisted that both categories constituted academic dishonesty, students did not understand why asking "How was the test?" or "What kinds of topics were covered?" was considered cheating by Jane. Even one student, Elise, who acknowledged that teachers "can't give all their classes the same test at the same time," drew these distinctions.

The discussion ended with talk about changes in ethics over time. Samantha, another student, expressed frustration, saying, "I don't get why it's cheating when it's just polite conversation!" may seem like excuse-making for those like Jane (who "deliberately avoided that kind of conversation"), but for teens growing up during an age where digital intimacy means that some teens tweet, text, Facebook, and video their way through the day, dishing about what a teacher wanted you to know about Shakespeare is considered a kind of collective sharing. Amelie rejects the deficit framing of the conversation as "academic dishonesty" by telling her teacher that "values . . . have changed a lot." She pointed out the differences between the expectations of students when Jane was in high school and the pressures that she and her peers face today.

What Jane Learned from Analyzing Her Teacher Talk

After Jane talked about academic integrity with her students, she sat down with Ebony to view the video and to examine the differences between the ways that she defined and characterized academic integrity, academic dishonesty, and plagiarism, and how her students did so. Together, Jane and Ebony generated the categories delineated above. Jane then wrote a brief reflection about the experience, listing her ideas and notes for teaching:

Jane's Thoughts

It's important to highlight ways in which academic dishonesty can be expressed (different forms).

Students' positioning and relationships to academic integrity are interesting to observe.

Underlying values are relevant.

Do students care? To what extent and about what? Getting caught—or?

What are other directions this conversation might have taken?

Language that invites open listening as opposed to defensive positioning on the part of students is important. (Even with neutral, as opposed to accusatory, language, they seem to "defend" the value of academic dishonesty! Curious about why they tried to justify it.)

Language addressing values and morals can be inflammatory—it is important to keep emotions out as much as possible and yet sometimes it is important to dramatize strong feelings.

Jane concluded by writing, "Students seemed open, and they demonstrated the ability to think critically (at least some did). Some students were not operating in the realm of logic. It is important to listen to them and show respect even when I disagree with their opinions. It takes patience and restraint to listen and then draw ideas together."

Conclusion: Uploading Plagiarism 2.0

How we handle academic integrity with our students has implications beyond our individual classrooms. As educators, we make important distinctions when we evaluate student assignments for different purposes. We may ask our students to bring in direct quotes about a topic or from a novel, and for doing so, they receive full credit on an assignment. To us, the distinctions between smaller assignments that build student understanding, help stimulate ideas for prewriting, or develop collaborative skills, and essays, projects, and exams intended for final, independent evaluation of student capabilities, are clear. For our students, they may not be. Although, like Jane's student Aidan, they may parrot our rationales—"you're cheating yourself"—whether or not all students fully understand them (and the ethics that underpin them) is questionable.

Our aim as teachers of writing is to develop students' ability to put "ideas, questions, and problems into words, mulling them over so they can see them from different angles and reason their way . . . to where they want to stand" (Rex, Thomas, and Engel 56). To that end, Price and Howard offer insight into how, like Jane, we might shift our writing pedagogy from merely policing plagiarism toward engaging in rich conversations with students about academic integrity:

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1. Socialize students into discourse communities of academic writing by providing invitations for students to "question and discuss plagiarism" (Price 105).
2. Acknowledge that what constitutes plagiarism is context dependent. Indicate in written policies that citation is a convention, and "conventions shift across time and locations" (Price 106).
3. Provide clarity about the historical origins of and contemporary rationales for citations in academic writing (Howard 789).
4. Acknowledge alternate ideas about authorship, including oral traditions and voice merging, and other perceptions about originality that come from nonwestern cultures, which many of our students and their families come from (Howard 792).
5. Invite students to practice different kinds of ways of attributing outside sources and their own work (Price 108–09).

The ways that we talk about plagiarism and academic integrity in the digital age pose new challenges never seen before in the profession. High school teachers are grappling with the same issues that college composition instructors are taking up; see, for example, the CCCC statement on "Transforming Our Understanding of Copyright and Fair Use" (http://www.ncte.org/cccc/committees/ip/ipreports/transforming). It is difficult to anticipate what new ethical dilemmas will arise. For example, while multimodal composing has brought with it an acknowledgment of patchwriting as a strategy that digital natives often use, there are still situations—writing on demand is one of them—when students will have to write convincingly without the aid of the Internet and access to the ideas of others (Gere, Christenbury, and Sassi). While not engaged in this kind of academic writing, however, students may choose to make their work public in a number of ways. For example, they may choose to use the tools in the creative commons to publish their work. The designers of Creative Commons "work to increase the amount of creativity (cultural, educational, and scientific content) in 'the commons'—the body of work that is available to the public for free and legal sharing, use, repurposing, and remixing" ("What"). Just as we have always had an obligation to teach students the positive traits that help them avoid plagiarism, such as citing sources correctly, we now need to learn what kinds of materials are free for the remixing that is a hallmark of students' digital literacy.

It's time to upload Plagiarism 2.0—the old rules no longer apply.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Technology and Copyright Law: A 'Futurespective,'" students research past copyright disputes and their relation to technology innovations before predicting future copyright disputes that may arise from technological advancements. Students sort images of technology advancements into chronological order and compare them with changes in copyright law. Next, students research and report on several instances that show how copyright laws have adapted to encompass new technologies and discuss the role of technology innovations in recent copyright disputes. Students brainstorm emerging technologies or technologies that they think will be adapted or invented in the future. Finally, they write newspaper articles predicting the outcome of current copyright disputes related to technology and predicting copyright issues that may arise with new and future technologies.
http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/technology-copyright-futurespective-1075.html

Nancy Guillot Pearson

Classrooms That Discourage Plagiarism and Welcome Technology

Responsible, creative use of the Internet and involving students in engaging assignments are key for helping students develop positive attitudes about intellectual property. This high school teacher shares her related classroom experiences and suggestions.

While some may regard plagiarism as a problem mainly confined to institutions of higher learning, recent evidence indicates that even well-established and highly regarded professional writers are succumbing to the temptation to cheat, finding themselves in the awkward position of issuing apologies instead of signing autographs. Such is the high-profile case of historian Steven Ambrose whose 2002 plagiarism incident exposed him for using passages from the works of others and attempting to pass them off as his own. Ambrose readily admitted his wrongdoing, and just as some were willing to accept his gracious apology, more evidence of plagiarism was detected in several of his works (Nelson 383–85). As technology continues to improve, so do the chances of the plagiarist getting caught in the act. This detection is especially true in the high school classroom—a place where an individual's propensity to steal the intellectual property of another is often first discovered. While solutions for dealing with the issue of plagiarism may be difficult to impose, teachers do command some authority on the subject. However, to combat this widespread phenomenon effectively, teachers must understand the reasons for student plagiarism and develop strategies for reducing its incidence.

Most teachers can offer a near verbatim dictionary definition of plagiarism and offer this description while discussing the topic, but what exactly does the definition represent to students? According to Elaine S. Barry, who cites the research of several studies, college students were unable to recognize plagiarism in samples designed to test their knowledge of the concept (377). Barry's references indicate that some students fall into plagiarizing work because they simply do not understand paraphrasing and citation rules (378). While students may have the ability to provide a rote definition of the concept, they need practice in paraphrasing, quoting, and citing sources while still in high school. It seems contradictory to enforce accountability on students when they have not received the instruction needed to develop an understanding of a concept. Obviously, students need exposure to the concept at all levels of schooling, and instruction should not be limited to the postsecondary classroom.

The key to establishing a defense against plagiarism is understanding the reasons that students engage in the process in the first place. Many students enter new grade levels academically unprepared for new challenges. When students encounter gaps between knowledge and the expectations of the classroom, some engage in unethical practices to propel themselves to the degree necessary to reach the A level regardless of the possible negative ramifications of such actions. Since educators know that discrepancies exist between actual knowledge and grade-level expectations, they should pursue methods for bridging these gaps.

Plagiarism in the Classroom

In addition to problems dealing with a lack of knowledge serving as a catalyst to cheating, some assignments and teaching behaviors even encourage plagiarism. Mary Ellen Scribner points out

several teaching flaws that contribute to student dishonesty. For practical purposes, these flaws can be placed into the following categories: assigning work that lacks technological relevance; reusing old and outdated assignments; having unrealistic expectations; not teaching necessary skills; not adequately checking sources; and accepting work without proper documentation (32).

One of the most unpleasant aspects of teaching is dealing with instances of student cheating and plagiarism. With each incoming class, teachers face a new wave of students and a new group of potential plagiarists. However, technological developments offer educators avenues to track their cheaters. The turn of the 21st century welcomed an influx of online companies offering detection services (Turnitin.com, Copyscape.com, Eve 2) that scan millions of Internet sites to locate similarities between a student's composition and the textual content of a website.

While detection technology serves as a practical tool for the classroom teacher, its value is being undermined by other online companies offering *learner* services. Compounding the problem of sites offering students new ways of working around assignments is the disappointing reality that the findings of detection services can only offer evidence of plagiarism and not conclusive proof of an assignment's authenticity. As teachers spend hours attempting to validate student work by checking website content and utilizing plagiarism detection services, the modern-day plagiarist is one step ahead of the teacher by obtaining information and subscriptions from a host of online sources including companies that promote their services under the label of *educational resources.*

Plagiarized writing is easily identified by the classroom teacher who is often at a loss when it comes to identifying an exact source of suspect material. Often, the inconsistency that teachers note occurs in voice—a discrepancy between the writing/speaking style of the student and the linguistic features of a plagiarized work. Students engaging in deceptive practices sometimes use a cut-and-paste approach where they copy information verbatim from a website, placing information into their own documents without removing certain website formatting features from their final drafts. A teacher noting such irregularities may easily match the plagiarized work to its original source. However, savvy students are developing new techniques of cheating, ranging from changing key words or facts to using chat rooms and other forms of Internet forums to conduct online cheating, not so easily traced as work copied from a documented source. It is difficult for teachers "to spot a plagiarized paper written on a student level" (Henry 228) and more and more students are turning to this form of cheating to problem solve (228). Ironically, dishonest students are solving one problem only to create another. When students cheat they are actually depriving themselves of formulating questions, analyzing relevant information, and reflection (Foss and Lathrop 164). Educational collaborators Kathleen Foss and Ann Lathrop agree that a "teacher's role is to guide, inspire, and support," keeping in mind that in this profession it is impossible to create "plagiarism-proof assignments" (165). The percentage of online cheating among students continues to rise. According to student-related statistics gathered in 2001, "54 percent of respondents admitted they have done at least some Internet-related plagiarism" (Branch 11).

PlagiarismDetect.com, a free online detection service, offers students the opportunity to submit papers before they turn them in. Instead of serving as a site for cheating, the purpose of the service is to help students identify plagiarism and deal with the issue before submitting an academic paper.

Online Plagiarism

One recent development on the plagiarism front is a new spin on software detection programs. PlagiarismDetect.com, a free online detection service, offers students the opportunity to submit papers before they turn them in. Instead of serving as a site for cheating, the purpose of the service is to help students identify plagiarism and deal with the issue before submitting an academic paper. Teachers could easily add the requirement of submitting papers to this service as a part of classroom procedure. While having students go through this extra step will not solve the problem of plagiarism, it may represent a positive method of teaching students to

recognize and deal with plagiarism on their own. On another note, it is also advisable for teachers to check the validity and the features of the site before directing students to this service.

A consequence of the technological revolution is the rising implication that some teachers act as contributors to actual incidents of online student cheating. Several sites offer question and answer forums, with students posing questions regarding school assignments. An example from a random search on Yahoo! Answers for grammar-related and homework questions may yield thousands of results. Site users often request the help of others in either locating or providing specialized information. The type of help needed ranges in complexity, and those seeking answers may select a best answer from those offered or have the option of allowing other site users to select an answer for them. Individuals respond in a game-style format with some providers occasionally identifying themselves as English teachers. When conducting a brief evaluation of answers, any visitor to the site may note that much of the feedback lacks both explanation and/or accuracy. A specific example from the same site consists of an appeal for help with an essay ("I'm Looking"). In this case the student requests honest feedback and provides an external link to a social networking site (Xanga) for potential evaluators to access her writing sample. The student also provides the essay prompt—everything needed to receive advice for writing her paper. Obviously, after reviewing the multi-paragraph essay located on Xanga, one reader who identifies himself or herself as an English teacher judges the student entry as an underdeveloped composition in need of revision. This teacher-reader offers a few revision recommendations, for example, avoiding use of the second-person pronoun, and gives a few reasons for the suggested changes. While the teacher-reader makes valid suggestions and offers some logical revisions, one must wonder if the student internalized the teacher critique or if the student simply accepted the changes without thinking about them. The student received limited feedback, but she also missed an opportunity to share an authentic experience with the real teacher, lost the chance of engaging in reflection, and engaged in a potential "cheating" situation. Knowing that these outside circumstances exist, the objective for the classroom teacher becomes one of creating a dynamic learning environment where students can respond without seeking outside sources and without feeling the need to engage in deceptive practices to complete assignments. According to Internet statistics for May 2006, Yahoo! Answers garnered 2.94% of the market share of searches, or the third spot, just below Wikipedia and Dictionary.com (Sullivan) and received the distinction of being among the "50 Best Websites 2008" by *Time* (Hamilton). If students are flocking to these information websites, why not make their visits meaningful?

Harnessing the Internet's Value

Overall, the Internet is an indispensible tool that offers a host of valuable resources, despite some of the problems associated with it. Teachers must learn to navigate the Internet and sift through information themselves, using the available information to enhance student learning.

Many students come to the classroom lacking English proficiency. Creating technology-related grammatical assignments would offer such students enriching practice through an interactive, engaging medium. While students may groan at the sight of a grammar worksheet and, even worse, copy answers from fellow classmates to complete such assignments, they may respond positively to the idea of detecting grammatical irregularities or evaluating sentence structures from an online political speech from either a favorite or controversial politician. If the teaching objective is to have students learn about dialect, why not have students evaluate speech patterns from a dramatic performance from an Internet source of their own choosing? A student who needs extra practice in punctuation and usage could investigate the dialectical features of an author's work (Ernest Gaines, Gwendolyn Brooks, Gary Soto, Mark Twain) and create an original transcription into Standard English. Students studying persuasion and argument may have the opportunity of evaluating rhetorical styles of political commentators. Instead of requiring students to read historical fiction, why not allow them to explore firsthand accounts and interviews? Even online feedback poses potential benefits. Recent analysis of the benefits of small-group online discussion groups evidenced that students' progress is sometimes enhanced when students familiarize

themselves with peers through feedback and support (Curtis 144). The possibilities for the utilization of Internet sources in the classroom are encouraging, and the technology continues to grow, offering additional optimism.

The value of feedback should not be underestimated. While many educators may agree on the benefits of thoughtful discussion in the classroom, obtaining such feats is not as spontaneous as some may think. To move away from teacher-dominated formats resembling question-and-answer sessions, it is necessary for teachers to develop competency in the type of questioning that builds and sharpens individual perspectives that "help create and maintain the culture of a class" (Christensen 157). According to C. Roland Christensen, no one feature of discussion outweighs the other—questioning, listening, and response work together and equally to create the type of classroom atmosphere that educators value and aspire to (155–56).

What the researchers of the online discussion groups discovered is that students require "authentic social interactions to better support meaningful learning" (Curtis 143). In real-life classrooms, teachers often rely solely on curriculum to provide learning opportunities, and in doing so they sometimes allow it to dictate a traditional format. However, to engage students in a greater sense, educators must view curriculum as a product instead of a foundation and should investigate methods of effective delivery. *Ways of Knowing and the Curriculum* explores four distinguishable methods of knowing that underlie the concept of curricula, and these ways of knowing form the basis of eight approaches to curriculum design (Kimpston, Williams, and Stockton 154). Students can benefit from an exposure to a curriculum that leads them away from subject-driven formats and encourages them to develop their talents and to think independently. By using differing approaches to curriculum design teachers can create greater opportunities for today's learner. Likewise, teachers must explore ways of merging technology-related activities within layers of instruction.

Provoking Lessons

Students develop greater autonomy when they accept some sense of responsibility for the learning taking place. When students share in the *authority* of instruction, they function collectively as active problem solvers and stakeholders in the educational process. An example of this type of collaboration transpired in my English III class after students evaluated online recordings of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) from people representing various age groups and time periods. A female student, Nicki, openly criticized fellow students and author James Baldwin (*If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?*) by saying that it was arrogant for anyone to say that African Americans have their own language, when in fact a more accurate way to characterize black language would be to label it as a dialect of English. Nicki was adamant in her protests, and her view drew many comments from those in the class. One student, Ben, proposed the idea that Baldwin's essay was more than just a commentary on language—it was a commentary on color. Ben raised the eloquent argument that Baldwin was making a point about the acceptance of differences and that his idea had more to do with showing the effects of segregation and bigotry than it did with language, with language being the vehicle used to make the more profound statement. While Ben and Nicki concentrated on evaluating the written work, other students, Drew, Kristen, and Jasmine, noted changes in the online samples of dialectical patterns in black speech over time and claimed that the changes indicated an evolving language within African American culture, serving as additional support for the "separate" language argument. The discussion's intent was not aimed at attacking Nicki's comment nor was it an attempt to change her opinion of language. However, as the students continued with the discussion, Nicki began to form a new perspective. Suddenly she seemed to realize that her view was a narrow one, and she withdrew her original statement. I am convinced that this positive learning experience resulted from the method in which we utilized available technology. Based on my experiences with this group of students, I know that if the activity had been assigned as a reading along

When students share in the *authority* of instruction, they function collectively as active problem solvers and stakeholders in the educational process.

with a writing activity for completion outside of class that the majority of students would have used online summaries to complete it. In this type of pedagogical circumstance, both the effort and the benefit would have been miniscule and basically a waste of time—both mine and the students. What I witnessed instead was authentic, unexpected, and spontaneous. The students enjoyed the activity and felt that they had gained insight into both language and expression. While this activity was a success, it is difficult to accept the idea that the majority of assignments completed outside of class are filtered through the Internet for answers before they reach the teacher's desk. This idea alone should spark the impetus for change in the way that teachers structure classroom activities.

While imparting an understanding of the value of intellectual property to students should remain a priority for educators, accomplishing this goal requires instructional planning rather than warnings to students about the negative consequences of unethical behavior.

Students need and desire thought-provoking lessons. Often teachers search for new avenues to reach students and many are neglecting the most valuable resource of all—the Internet. It is unfortunate that many teachers are not utilizing this technology. These same teachers feel a strong responsibility to themselves, their students, and their profession—sentiments that fuel them to go above and beyond to achieve success in the classroom—an irony of sorts when considering that such efforts often end in disappointment at the discovery of plagiarized work. However, acknowledging responsibility for this paradoxical situation is a first step toward progress.

In a *Nightline* segment uploaded to YouTube, "Information Overload," Ted Koppel makes the observation that "we record everything" and that we do a disservice to future generations by creating a mediocrity where "we are losing our ability to manage ideas, to contemplate, to think." Of the several uploaded segments of Koppel's news brief to the website, at one time his commentary had fewer than 50,000 views. The same viewers of Koppel's video have the opportunity to view "Flea Market Montgomery," a humorous advertisement-rap created by an Alabama businessperson that has more than six million views. What these numbers indicate is that people often seek entertainment over serious journalism. Knowing this does not diminish Koppel's message or inflate the worth of the other. In fact, understanding culture is what keeps a classroom dynamic and opens possibilities for real learning to take place.

While imparting an understanding of the value of intellectual property to students should remain a priority for educators, accomplishing this goal requires instructional planning rather than warnings to students about the negative consequences of unethical behavior. What students need is writing practice, and teachers can promote this application through online activities that help students of all levels and learning modalities to build skill and confidence in their abilities. Examples of online resources that may foster an awareness of writing processes and conventions include the following:

- Article databases: Provide access to tens of thousands of articles on culturally relevant topics; class activities may include chart/graph creation, debate, comparison/contrast writing
- Citation generators: Users insert source information according to categories for proper citation displays
- Digital storytelling: Users create visuals and text to sequence and narrate stories with Photo Story or Storyboard
- Documentation (APA and MLA) games: Users engage in a variety of citation identification activities
- Essay graders: Users submit writing for individualized feedback (available through some Web services and textbook providers)
- Graph generators: Users provide statistics to create a visual representation of information
- Letter generators: Allows users to independently practice letter writing using text boxes and prompts to guide them through the parts of a letter
- Mock social networking scenarios: Students imitate social networking formulas by creating dialogue in response to writing prompts
- Outline generators: Users upload topic information into text boxes arranged in a preformatted outline as a prewriting activity

- Poetry generators: Provides users a means of experimenting with language and the parts of speech
- Research generators: Condenses Internet subject searches into detailed source reports
- Sentence and paragraph generators: Users insert words or sentences for random assembly; provides users a means of exploring sentence syntax and paragraph formation
- Speech databases: Visitors may analyze audio versions of political or special interest speeches in terms of rhetoric, vernacular, and tone
- Vocabulary generators: Users create flashcards, puzzles, or games using select words

Internet-related activities provide students with alternate methods of learning, which can, in turn, lead to greater self-expression, autonomy of thinking, and confidence in ability. These factors may also increase student awareness of the principles of authorship while lessening the likelihood of them engaging in plagiarism to problem solve.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

ReadWriteThink.org offers interactive tools that help students accomplish a variety of goals—from organizing and summarizing to inquiry and analysis. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/

Kyle Vaughn

Reading the Literature of War: A Global Perspective on Ethics

A high school teacher reflects on how reading literature of war can open students' eyes to the needs of others and help them understand the importance of humanitarian action. Contemporary literary works and examples of classroom assignments are described and recommended.

Why do we keep reading about all these poor people?" "Is everything this bleak?" "Aren't there any happy endings?" These questions inevitably come up near the end of October in my course The Wisdom of Camouflage: The Literature of War in the Non-Western World after only two months of readings that generally don't have happy endings. I have to admit that I used to take a little offense at some of these questions, particularly the one about impoverished people. Wasn't everyone at least somewhat aware of the state of the world? Didn't the students want enlightenment enough to face what were sometimes terrible, dark endings? Shouldn't everyone's initial response be bleeding-heart compassion? The first couple of semesters that I had to face such questions from the students, I braced myself, thinking that we were in for a long ride ahead. But every semester of the course, after seeing both their intellect and their hearts develop, I found that students didn't mean these questions to be elitist or aloof. These places, these people, these events that we read about were simply so foreign, so unusual to the world of the US teenager, that they simply had to find a reference point before they could even begin to put these stories into a real and human context.

When I came to the Hockaday School many years ago, a similar course on the literature of war was already in place. I must admit I did a bit of a double-take on seeing this in the course catalog. Hockaday is, after all, an all-girls school. Would teenage girls be so interested in war? I see now what a prejudicial thought that was, assuming what teenage girls would or wouldn't like. Now, I know better, so when my peers at the all-boys school down the road ask me the same question, I take delight in commending the versatility of the adolescent female mind.

Early Versions of a War Literature Course

That early version of the course covered some classic and fantastic literature: Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage,* Arthur Miller's *All My Sons,* Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five,* Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* and lots of Shakespeare, among other authors and texts. Let there be no doubt about the power and importance of these works. They teach so much so eloquently about war, violence, courage, fear, and human nature. Some of the works, especially Vonnegut, seemed to open students to a whole new way of looking at literature, sending them off into a sudden burst of pleasure reading.

But something was missing, too. Something about these texts, something about the overall context didn't speak to the students urgently enough. They approached the readings with sincere engagement and deft analytical ability, but when a text was over, it was over and time to move on to the next. It was little more than an intellectual exercise. We would talk about courage, and we would even try to draw comparisons from our own lives in hopes of understanding and feeling out the themes in question, but so much of what we found ended up vague and without emotion or deep response. At home, watching events unfold around the world, seeing US

troops deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq, watching documentaries about Rwanda, reading news reports about the extreme situations in Darfur, Uganda, and the Congo, something inside nagged at me. While it was admirable that we were even tackling the topic, while the texts we read were indeed classics, and while we could certainly draw some parallels, even if only tangentially, I came to realize that what the students needed, what they might respond to, was something current. They needed to know and face the stories of those affected by the many conflicts raging around our world. Not only did they need it, but I needed it—I needed to feel like I wasn't simply teaching literature as ancient history, but as a breathing and viable thing, capable of speaking to and changing the world. Our hearts needed to be confronted more directly. We needed more immediate literature so that our response would be more immediate. I wanted students to understand how our actions here have impact far away, how we live in a global society, and how there are many even here in our own community who have experienced war and have come to the United States as refugees. We needed a better and more human understanding of the politics involved, a better understanding of blood diamonds, land mines, child soldiers, torture, suicide bombings, conflict minerals, fair wages, disease, shortages of food and water, problems with aid, and the many issues of gender, age, race, and class. We needed to know more about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and surprisingly even more about Christianity in many cases. We even needed to open ourselves to perspectives about democracy and capitalism that came from outside of our own American way of thinking so that we could understand what others around the world might be thinking and feeling. Not only did we need to look at our own personal ethics, but as our nation and the entire world seemed to be at a crossroads, we needed to look at the American system of ethics and place it in a more informed context of what the ethics and morals of other cultures looked like. And there was plenty of good literature that could do this for us.

A New Version Develops

Thus, it was because of these revelations and because of the encouragement of a supportive department chair that I formed a new version of the course, The Wisdom of Camouflage: The Literature of War in the Non-Western World. The phrase "wisdom of camouflage" comes from Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai's poem "Anniversaries of War." In the section titled "What Did I Learn in the Wars," Amichai says that he "learned the wisdom of camouflage, / Not to stand out, not to be recognized, / Not to be apart from what's around [him]" (412). This serves as the perfect introduction to the course, one that sets non-Western literature apart from the US sense of bravado. It establishes the deep questions of identity that are a continual thread throughout all of our readings.

In the age of smart bombs, drones, and violent video games, there is perhaps no more pertinent issue than to remind students of the necessity to stop and consider the effects of our decisions on other human beings. It would seem at times that mainstream America has replaced a moral sense of ethics with an ethics more related to safety, efficiency, and the economy.

We begin the course with several poems by Amichai, a poet who was respected by both Palestinians and Israelis, and discuss the personal nature of violence. In an interview with Esther Robbins for the Lannan Foundation, Amichai himself says that all poetry is political, even love poetry. So Amichai's poetry provides some fantastic imagery for students to understand the intimacy and passion involved in conflict. In the age of smart bombs, drones, and violent video games, there is perhaps no more pertinent issue than to remind students of the necessity to stop and consider the effects of our decisions on other human beings. It would seem at times that mainstream America has replaced a moral sense of ethics with an ethics more related to safety, efficiency, and the economy.

We also begin with an excerpt from Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts,* a memoir about Thwe's involvement in the rebellion against the dictatorship in Burma. The excerpt is always one I read in class so that I can help to immediately alleviate any distress that comes from Thwe's description of his lover's murder at the hands of government agents. It's not that the description is graphic, but it is the starkness and simplicity, the rawness with which Thwe describes the

event and its after-effects that often leaves students with a sudden realization that our work at hand is quite serious and a matter not just of the mind, but of the heart. This first topic of violence being so personal and these first readings help us to put a human face on the issue of global conflict and help the students to realize that it might not only be our attention that is needed, but also a shaping of our ethics and our willingness to respond.

Our first novel of the semester is Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul,* a story set in Taliban-era Afghanistan that follows the lives of two couples, one of them of the disappearing middle class. Khadra's descriptions of Afghanistan and the lives torn by war there are haunting and bleak but beautifully written. From Afghanistan, we travel to Sudan and read *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky,* a memoir of three of the Lost Boys of Darfur, Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak. Though the boys' trials are frightening, feel never-ending, and at times even seem unreal, the book serves as a nice follow-up to the desolation of *Swallows,* for *Fire* offers some hope. Benson, Alepho, and Benjamin survive; they ultimately make it to the United States and start new lives. And after looking at a selection of poems, essays, and stories from places such as Iraq, India, China, South Africa, and Vietnam, we end the semester with journalist Joe Sacco's *Palestine,* a graphic novel about the reporter's travels through Palestinian refugee camps. The graphic-novel format lends itself well to the urgent nature of the course material. We watch the films *Osama, The Fog of War, God Grew Tired of Us,* and *Promises.* If there's time, I still like to show *Dr. Strangelove* for a bit of comic relief.

I ask the students to simply respond to the question, "How do we redeem a culture torn by war?" I ask them to go beyond the pat answers that would boil down to "Why can't we all just get along?"

I also highly recommend Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis.* It's a text all students read in their World Literature course, so I don't repeat it in this course, but it otherwise would be a perfect fit. The portrait Satrapi creates of herself represents a feminine strength important and sometimes overlooked in the context of war. This is a semester course, so there are many wonderful texts we don't get to, and I offer an extensive recommended reading list in the sidebar. There are other strong female protagonists represented there as well as important work by a wide range of poets, fiction writers, essayists, and even a few Western writers who reflect on war in other important and unusual ways.

To refer to some scholarship in this area and to find even more readings surrounding the conflict in the Middle East, I encourage you to check out two previous articles in *English Journal,* Allen Webb's "Literature from the Modern Middle East: Making a Living Connection" and Linda R. Silver's "Israeli Encounters: Books for Teens about Israel." These articles are interesting to look at side by side, Silver's article being a response to Webb's, and the dialogue that results from comparing them proves yet again how multifaceted the problems of war are.

Reflecting on the Faces of War

In addition to the personal nature of violence, we look at several other themes. In a unit on the problems of exile, we include philosophers, poets, and essayists such as Edward W. Said, Salman Rushdie, Edmund Jabès and Marcel Cohen, René Char, and E. M. Cioran. Perhaps our most important theme of the year is that of redemption. For one major paper, I ask the students to simply respond to the question, "How do we redeem a culture torn by war?" I ask them to go beyond the pat answers that would boil down to "Why can't we all just get along?" Point-of-view writing also plays a large role in the course. Writing from the point of view of another person, particularly an oppressed woman, gives the students a chance to imagine more deeply the problems those in war-torn countries may face. I encourage students to respond in a variety of modes: poetry, creative nonfiction (both personal narrative and essays), fiction, even their own visual texts (in the style of the graphic novel, but at the length of a short story or poem).

It's difficult work. There are tears, sometimes mine. In fact, even today I screened *God Grew Tired of Us,* a documentary I've shown probably five or six times before, and still found myself tearing up over one segment about the Lost Boys. The girls who take the course are incredibly brave. They bear it well. There are times we sit in silence, times we have to avert our eyes from an image, but rarely have I had a girl leave the room because she couldn't

handle it. I've only had one girl switch out of the course early on because she found the material too difficult. In many ways, I don't blame her. I've often wondered how long I'll be able to sustain this work emotionally. Sometimes I can't decide if I should take a long rest from considering such things or run straightaway to one of these suffering places, sacrificing everything once and for all.

Turning to the Positive

I hope that as time goes on I'll lean toward the latter. I certainly hope that my students will run toward those who need help and never away. For when we talk about ethics, when we talk about living moral and meaningful lives, we're often not talking simply about attitudes, but about actions. The first semester I offered the course, I did indeed find it quite bleak, at times hopeless. I knew that wasn't right. That wasn't what I believed about the world, and I knew of so many others out there working for good things who believed all wasn't lost. So the next semester I had the girls offer presentations on individuals and groups working for positive change in the regions we read about and here in the United States as well. This opened up new ideas and possibilities for action. We could see and hear the stories of specific people in the world acting compassionately and ethically within situations that are often the most unethical and unjust conditions possible. We could see how people forgive and how they work to help and change and save. We could see how people who do such things must sacrifice. I've found that those presentations provided wonderful positive examples, but they also caused students to read the texts differently. Somewhere in the back of their minds was always a possibility, a growing desire to try to address the problems we were reading about. More fascinating and unique solutions to world issues began to pour out of our discussions.

The ethical and moral decisions I ask the students to consider and the actions that we end up discussing as possibilities are quite varied. We talk about voting, but not just in the traditional sense, as with political parties and the standard platforms. We talk about some of the seemingly minute issues that can have incredible impact on the lives of refugees. Take, for instance, public transportation referendums. Refugees in the United States need increased access to better public transportation. Unfortunately, affluent communities in particular tend to vote down public transportation referendums or at the least limit them to certain parts of a city. I challenge the students to see this as an ethical and humanitarian issue by showing them a picture of the Dhamalas, a Bhutanese refugee family my wife and I mentor, and by telling their story and their struggles with transportation and how that affects their work and home life. And we talk about the importance of volunteering and giving money to causes, organizations, and individuals. We talk about writing letters, both politically and personally. One semester a class decided that as a final project they wanted to write encouraging letters to a group of children on an African island that had seen conflict. And being a class on the literature of war, we indeed must reflect on language itself and its relation to conflict. There are countless implications of the language used to describe the people and the situations we encounter.

We talk often about just how far we can take our ethics into the realm of action. Will we continue to simply talk, will we act enough to merely alleviate guilt, or will we stretch beyond comfort, sacrifice, and act for true and lasting change?

We talk often about just how far we can take our ethics into the realm of action. Will we continue to simply talk, will we act enough to merely alleviate guilt, or will we stretch beyond comfort, sacrifice, and act for true and lasting change? When we discuss Nelson Mandela, I am sure to tell students about and read work from his fellow prisoner Dennis Brutus, the biracial poet who could have passed as white but self-identified as black because it was the right thing to do. What comfort he sacrificed to stand up for truth. I challenge the students to consider sacrifice as a desirable possibility and to see comfort as an all-too-easy enemy in the battle for progress. Humanitarian work is not exactly lucrative or cushy.

Questions and Dialogue

Going out and acting aside, even continuing to simply shape attitudes remains an important aspect of the course, for so much of what we encounter is new territory or an issue that is a touchstone in current

ADDITIONAL READINGS TO ENCOURAGE ETHICS STUDIES IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT

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discourse. In some cases, we don't even necessarily come to an answer but recognize the importance of asking the questions and beginning dialogue. How should we view Muslims? How should we view anyone who is extremely different from us in some aspect? How should we feel about 9/11? Should we feel the same way forever, or should we forgive? Can war ever be justified? Have views about wars or actions in war that were justified at one point changed as time went on? Even if we take a stance for peace, what if it still comes down to "us or them"? Is there a humanitarian way to wage a war? Can the United States police the world? What will happen if we don't? How many refugees should we let in? What ethical codes should aid organizations operate by? What are acceptable compromises when negotiating with others? Should each country be subjected to the same human rights scrutiny when their values differ? Is it right to tell other nations they can't have nuclear weapons? What are the ethics involved with the preemptive strike? How do we define evil in relation to war? Is torture ever right?

Though I may initially get the somewhat trivial and self-serving questions I began this article with, the students mainly respond with insight, justified outrage, compassion, and even tangible action. They often express shock, not just about the events themselves but also about what they didn't know; sometimes something even as large as millions of people dying in conflict in regions of Africa goes completely unreported in major US news outlets. Recently one student suddenly exclaimed that she knew she would learn things in the course and that some of her attitudes may even change, but she was surprised at what some of those attitudes were. She admitted that she unconsciously held certain stereotypes about the ways families around the world work, and only after reading *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky* did she realize that people in places such as Africa cared about family as much as,

if not more than, we do in the United States. She said that she had, in a way, failed to imagine the full realities of the tragedy refugees face when torn from their homeland and their family because of war.

Changing Attitudes

I thought the realization an important one, so I had the rest of the class reflect on how some of their attitudes had been changed. Their responses at once filled me with joy but also with an overwhelming feeling of how much work there is to do in simply spreading awareness and changing attitudes so that we can find common human understanding in the 21st century. One student noted how the material made her think about herself less. Particularly on class days, she found that she cared just a bit less how great her hair looked. Our material pulled her out of herself and her own world and opened her thinking to others. Another student admitted that she came into the class a cynic and felt sure that she would hold fast to her dislike of Muslims and the Middle East in general. After reading *The Swallows of Kabul,* she said that she began to realize the danger and the error of her thinking. She was surprised to find characters there that were educated, middle class, not different from her. How their lives were then compromised and shattered by a situation out of their control made her rethink her position. Several students reflected on the necessity to know and appreciate each person we encountered as an individual and how lumping them together in a mass of suffering people in a sense erased their identity. I like that one, and I think it important in terms of keeping a human face on the issues we encounter. Many students said they didn't realize just how many children were involved in and affected by these conflicts. One student described that as her understanding of world problems moved from the realm of facts, statistics, and Hollywood movies into the realm of the personal, she was "heartbroken, shaken, and frustrated." But she was moved to act. To her credit, she had already traveled to Guatemala to do missions work with her church. But to further respond to what she found in these texts, to help spread more awareness of such world issues, and to involve others, she started a chapter of the Invisible Children organization at our school.

This particular course is still fairly young, so I haven't yet been able to see the full fruits of the labor. However, three students who encountered similar material in my World Literature survey course have gone on to do interesting work. One is enrolled in an agricultural education master's program and hopes to work in third-world countries bettering their lives and access to food. Another recent graduate spent time in Nepal working at a community radio station that provided important education and information to local residents. And one former student, a recent Rhodes Scholar, founded an organization devoted to ending child prostitution in Cambodia. All three of those students already had an eye toward humanitarian work, so I know I can't take much credit, but I like to believe that at least some of what we learned ultimately led them in those wonderful directions.

I often sit back after class and hope that such will be the case—that more and more students will take what they have learned, go out, and act. I feel quite confident that all of them, regardless of their future vocational paths, will go out and act more ethically in regards to the questions of global conflict, refugees, suffering and need, and cultures that represent different viewpoints. Some of them may go on to found or work for charitable organizations. Maybe they even just volunteer their time or money to an already-existing organization. Or maybe it's as simple as kindness offered to a refugee working at the market down the road from our school. We can't afford for this next generation not to learn such lessons. Without such a response, so many in the world won't survive. And with more compassion, not only can we help others, but we can restore to our war-torn world a meaningfulness inherent in human life.

I'd like to close with a poem, "Jumpers," by a recent student, An Rhiel Wang. An Rhiel's poem about 9/11 is a poignant and heart-rending exploration of putting a human face on suffering and becoming aware of our response.

Jumpers

He soars—
drifting like a weightless paper.
One hundred and ten stories to the bottom.
He doesn't fight the fall;
rather, he embraces the will of the wind
and lets the sky cradle him into a deep sleep.
For the first time,
New York stops and the sidewalks are still,

waiting for the jumpers.
From below, a woman grasps her mouth,
screaming warm saliva
into the palm of her hand.
Tears slice through black ash that litters her face
and the world watches her,
I watch her,
as if we have the right.
The camera man pans away from her face and back
to the twin towers;
they stand like a shot man,
waiting to drop to his knees and then double over,
face down on hot concrete.
Another jumper soars.

I saw war in these suicides—
attempts at maintaining dignity by leaping to their
own fate.
Valor gave them grace in the face of death.
I saw war in her tears—
in the way they violently ripped down her face,
in the way they stained her.
I saw war in the audacity of the camera man—
invading the scene, curious of death.
I see war in me—
uninvolved.

Every time I read this poem, I am moved by An Rhiel's willingness to engage with the tragedies of war so thoughtfully. Though she ends with the word "uninvolved," it is clear that through her consideration of these images, she is now involved, having been so affected by seeing these faces. Awakening that kind of compassion is exactly what I'm hoping for.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Adapted from the NCTE book *Middle Ground: Exploring Selected Literature from and about the Middle East,* "Young Adult Literature about the Middle East: A Cultural Response Perspective" presents variations on traditional literature circles and exposes students to a variety of young adult fiction from and about the Middle East. Students read and share research and responses in collaborative groups. At the end of the lesson, students write a letter to welcome an immigrant student to their school and community. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/young-adult-literature-about-1136.html

Jacqueline N. Glasgow and Allison L. Baer

Lives beyond Suffering: The Child Soldiers of African Wars

The authors discuss teaching literacy as a means of transformation, and they use **A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier** *to engage students in the radical pedagogy of change. An annotated list of other works on victims of African wars is offered.*

"Run. Run. Run for your life. The rebels are here!" twelve-year-old Ishmael yells to his friends. Gunshots sounded like thunder striking the tin-roofed houses and shattering people's lives. Terrified by the gunfire, people screamed and ran, pushing and trampling anyone in the way. Families, separated from each other, left behind their worldly belongings. Ishmael and his friends ran full speed into the bush until the rebels gave up the chase.

This was Ishmael Beah's first experience with the civil war that raged in Sierra Leone in 1993. Having lost his home, his family, and his childhood, he wandered for a year and was finally taken by the government army and forced to kill or be killed. Ishmael was too young to understand this corrupt government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) that formed to protest it. Ishmael soon learned, however, that both sides of the war depended on child soldiers to accomplish their mission for power over the people and control of the lucrative diamond mines.

Sierra Leone is only one of the more than 50 armed conflicts currently going on around the world. It is estimated that 20 million children were either refugees or displaced internally, and some 300,000 children under the age of 18 were used in hostilities at any given time as government or rebel soldiers, with about one-third reportedly fighting in Africa (Machel). While "the recruitment of children under age 15 for military purposes is a war crime under a statute of the International Criminal Court," the United Nations contends that there are still as many as 16 armies that currently recruit children ("Child Labour"). The facts facing these children are horrific. According to the Thomson Reuters Foundation, orphaned and refugee children are frequently taken, some are forced into atrocious acts of violence against their own family to ensure that they cannot go home, many are given drugs to make them more willing warriors, and "some government forces capture and torture children suspected of supporting opposition groups" ("Factsheet").

What is to be our response as English educators to these events? Looking at teaching through the lens of "radical pedagogy" (O'Brien, Moje, and Stewart 34), we contend that we must teach about the plight of these children because it is our responsibility to challenge the status quo and expand students' experiences by engaging them in learning that helps develop their critical consciousness (Freire). We acknowledge that reading firsthand narratives describing the life of a child soldier might be considered too horrific or far removed from our students' lives; nonetheless, we believe it is important, in this case, for educators to view literature as a window through which our students will learn of others' lives and cultures (Daniels).

We begin by briefly discussing teaching as a means of transformation and literacy as a way of developing minds. Then, using Ishmael Beah's story as told in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier,* we present specific strategies to help teachers engage their students in the radical pedagogy of change.

Teaching Literacy to Transform and Transgress

According to David G. O'Brien, Elizabeth B. Moje, and Roger A. Stewart, there are three con-

ceptualizations of teaching: teaching as telling and controlling, teaching as celebrating experience, and teaching as transforming and transgressing (31–35). The first concept, teaching as telling and controlling, supports the idea of teachers covering content within the controlled atmosphere of the classroom by responding to organizational and time constraints through lecture and telling. Students, seen through this lens, are passive recipients of the knowledge deemed appropriate. The second concept, teaching as celebrating experience, emphasizes personal expression through exploring personal experience, a concept that draws on the work of Louise M. Rosenblatt and reader-response theory in which reading is seen as an active transaction between reader and text.

The third concept, teaching as transforming or transgressing, also known as "radical pedagogy," explicitly attempts to "build on and challenge students' experiences as members of both mainstream and marginalized social groups" (O'Brien, Moje, and Stewart 34). In a radical pedagogy model "texts should be critiqued and questioned for their limits, partiality, biases, and influences on the ways we come to know the world and act in it" (34).

There are multiple ways to look at teaching as transforming and transgressing. In her foundational work *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* bell hooks discusses "engaged pedagogy," which calls on teachers to be committed to creating a community of learners in which the teaching is done in a manner that empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning (15). This community creates a climate of intellectual rigor and openness, embraces multiculturalism, and encourages everyone to be responsible as they contribute to the goal of transformation. Jeffrey D. Wilhelm addresses the role of student responsibility in learning when he discusses the learning-centered model of teaching based on the work of Rogoff, Matsusov, and White. In this model, the goal is to transform the participation of the learner from one of passivity to that of "expert practitioners who are actually involved in whatever field of endeavor is associated with the knowledge domain under study" (Wilhelm 26). When viewed in the English classroom, the learning-centered model enhances one's understanding of a text as comprehension is built on purposeful, meaningful responses that require students to tap into their personal experiences while attending to the cultures and conventions of texts.

Teaching as a means of transformation and transgression asks teachers to let go of the control that we may be more comfortable with and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. It encourages thoughtfulness and participation in their own learning as students are confronted with lives and a world far removed from their own but important nonetheless, to their understanding of some of the harsh realities of the world in which they live. This is especially true in the unit we describe here on the horrors of child soldiering.

We have the responsibility to raise our students' literate lives beyond functional literacy and show them that literacy is a means of power and a higher individual calling that can and will transform their lives. We call on teachers to involve their students in reading and learning about others around the world, including the lives of the hundreds of thousands of child soldiers.

Radical pedagogy also depends on an expansive definition of literacy. Literacy is a complex concept that is much more than simply decoding and writing. It involves understanding, engagement, collaborations, connections, and more. Literacy is built on collaboration as people discuss and negotiate meaning from texts (Daniels; Tatum). Alfred W. Tatum describes various purposes for collaboration including group enlightenment, training young people in "habits of reading and reflection," "cultivating the mind and improving the heart," and preparation for participation in public forums (18).

Sylvia Scribner conceived of three metaphors that present a useful frame for the complexities of literacy (9–15). The first, literacy as adaptation, brings to mind the idea of functional literacy, the survival or pragmatic aspects of literacy. The second metaphor, literacy as power, "emphasizes a relationship between literacy and group or community advancement" (11). As developed in the work of Freire, people who are illiterate are more open to victimization, as reading and writing are powerful concepts that open the door to critical understanding and action. Literacy is seen as a means for human liberation and, ultimately, social change.

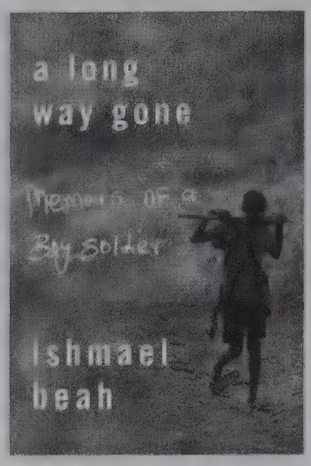
The third metaphor, literacy as a state of grace, views literacy as endowing one with special virtues. In this metaphor, literacy transcends political, economic, or social change as a literate life "derives its meaning and significance from intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual participation in the accumulated creations and knowledge of humankind, made available through the written word" (Scribner 14). In essence, one's literate life is a means to a higher calling.

As English teachers we have the responsibility to raise our students' literate lives beyond functional literacy and show them that literacy is a means of power and a higher individual calling that can and will transform their lives. For these reasons we call on teachers to involve their students in reading and learning about others around the world, including the lives of the hundreds of thousands of child soldiers.

While simply reading the books will surely spark thought and discussion, the following section describes active learning strategies meant to help teachers and students become engaged in the life of one particular child soldier, Ishmael Beah.

Teaching about a Child Soldier's Life

Ishmael Beah was a soldier until he was rescued by UNICEF at the age of 16. He tells his horrifying but compelling story in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier.* While Beah's memoir is the focus book for this unit on child soldiering, the instructional strategies introduced in this article may also be applied to the suggested books for literature circles (see sidebar). Novels such as Chris Abani's *Song for Night: A Novella* and Alan Stratton's *Chanda's Wars* show both the horror and the consequences of child soldiering through fictional accounts. Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* and Shenaaz Nanji's *Child of Dandelions* show the consequences of child soldiering and exile for girls in Uganda. Memoirs of the Lost Boys of Sudan show the consequences of exile and displacement found in Dave Eggers' *What Is the What?* and John Bul Dau and Michael S. Sweeney's *God Grew Tired of Us: A Memoir.*



This mix of fiction, nonfiction, and memoir provides multiple perspectives on child soldiering from the time of their recruitment, through their brainwashing to fight and kill, to their rehabilitation or reintegration process should they survive the ordeal. These children suffer from serious post-traumatic stress syndrome and need months of nurturing and care; otherwise they are at risk of continuing in a violent lifestyle long after a cease-fire. Interestingly, many of these former child soldiers, including Beah, currently live in the United States, attending school and working; some return to their native country to engage in the work of reconstruction.

Former child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. USAID photo.

Preparing to Read Books about Child Soldiering

Since the study of child soldiering is such a new and foreign topic for our students, building background knowledge is essential to the understanding of the geography, culture, and politics of the civil wars in Africa. Ethnic cleansing, religious persecution, and genocide may be foreign concepts for which students need a context before reading *A Long Way Gone* and the other works suggested for this unit.

Film Viewing

To build background knowledge and capture the hearts and minds of students, view the DVD *Invisible Children.* It can be purchased from http://www.invisiblechildren.com or viewed on Google Videos at http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=3166797753930210643. This tells the true tale of three young Americans who traveled to Africa in 2003 in search of a story. What they found in northern Uganda were the effects of the 20-year-long civil war between the government leadership and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA oppose the abuse of power of Ugandan leaders such as Milton Obete, Idi Amin, and Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. This documentary exposes children's fear of abduction by rebel soldiers, follows children who are actually abducted, and includes interviews with survivors. The documentary is fast-paced and informative, as well as life-changing.

Map Study of Africa

To build background knowledge and provide a context for the study of child soldiering, provide students with a map of Africa. Students can learn the names of the countries and their capitals by using the interactive map found at http://www.yourchildlearns.com/africa_map.htm. Students will also learn where the different countries are in relation to each other. Ishmael Beah provides a map of his journey, but students should see Sierra Leone in the larger context of the continent. Also, students should learn that the largest concentration of child soldiers living in the United States are the 8,000 Liberian immigrants living on Staten Island, New York. (For more information and video clips about the Liberian Child Soldiers of Staten Island, go to http://www.pulitzercenter.org/showproject.cfm?id=40.)

Map of West Africa showing Sierra Leone

Collaborative Group Presentations during the Reading of Beah's *A Long Way Gone*

Since Beah's *A Long Way Gone* contains potentially difficult and emotional context, asking students to lead the discussion, create writing assignments, lead a guided imagery, and research new vocabulary is a viable approach to studying the book and supports the goal of transformation.

To structure the reading, decide how many pages of *A Long Way Gone* students will read for each assignment. There are 218 pages in it, which could leave approximately 40 pages per each of five class meetings. Each of five groups will then be responsible for a presentation over the 40 pages they have signed up to teach. Each student in the group should be accountable for preparing one of the following activities for their 40 pages of text: guided imagery, sketchbook journal entry, one-minute vocabulary report, creative writing piece, artifact collection, and Socratic seminar (all explained below).

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery involves harnessing the power of the imagination and the emotions to effect learning outcomes. It taps into the students' background experience, enhancing comprehension by creating images in the mind's eye and brings life and vibrancy to a text (Duffy). Guided imagery sets a context for a section of the novel and takes the class on a mental journey (with eyes closed and body relaxed) through a critical moment of the novel. Students prepare this assignment for their section of the book by writing a one-page script for the guided imagery, making it personal by using verbs in second person. Afterward, they should ask the class what they "saw" or "experienced" through their imaginings. See Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. A Guided Imagery for Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (pages 23-25)

Imagine that you are twelve years old and you live in Mattu Jong in Sierra Leone. You are cooking dinner for yourself and your friends. The rice is done and the okra soup is almost ready when you hear a single gunshot that echoes through the town. You run outside to determine who fired the shot. A minute later, three more gunshots rapidly fire. You start to worry. Are the soldiers just practicing, or is this for real? You hear nothing more, so you go back to the kitchen and start dishing out the rice. Suddenly you hear a volley of gunshots taking over the town. It is so terrifying that you are confused. What should you do? In a matter of seconds, you hear people running and screaming. There are only two ways to enter Mattu Jong. One is by the road and the other by crossing the river Jong. You start running for your life in the direction where there were the fewest gunshots. You dodge from bush to bush and make it to the other side of the swamp, but that's when even more trouble begins. Grenades land nearby, followed by several rounds of machine gun fire. After about an hour of running, the rebels give up the chase while you continue on.

Sketchbook Journal Entry

Students preparing the Sketchbook Journal Entry choose a significant passage that makes a strong impression. After reflecting on the passage, the student then creates or chooses a graphic image or metaphor to represent the passage. The visual may be abstract or representational. The written response should include the following: (a) an explanation of the idea or visual metaphor, (b) a key quote (including page number) from the reading, (c) an explanation as to why the quote is significant and how it relates to the overall narrative of the novel, and (d) a thoughtful personal response and reflection related to the major themes in the reading (Glasgow and Rice). See Figure 2 for an excerpt of a Student Sketchbook Journal Entry created by Aaron Murray, a student in ENG 451 in fall 2008.

One-Minute Vocabulary Report

Vocabulary is an essential part of comprehension and some of the concepts and objects in these books may be outside students' experience, so it is vital to support students' reading by having them explore the vocabulary of the book. The student who prepares the One-Minute Vocabulary Report must provide a list of ten terms, concepts, or foreign

FIGURE 2. An Excerpt of a Student Sketchbook Journal Entry

"These are the men responsible for the bullet holes in your foot. It's time to make sure they never shoot at you or your comrades" (Beah, p. 159).

In this horrific passage, the Lieutenant in charge pointed to the line of six prisoners, and expected Beah to take revenge for his injuries by shooting them. Here is an example of an adult teaching a child to murder.

Beah says, "I shot them on their feet and watched them suffer for an entire day before finally shooting them in the head so that they would stop crying" (p. 159).

How could anyone be so merciless? How can young children commit such atrocities? Of course, Beah admits to smoking marijuana, snorting cocaine and *brown brown,* but still, even full of drugs, such cruelty is uncalled for. We talked in class about the fact that young children are recruited into soldiering precisely because their moral development isn't fully complete and that they can be desensitized to the point of having no conscience for these atrocious deeds. I can't even imagine how it would be possible to rehabilitate this child so he might reintegrate into a non-violent society.

FIGURE 3. One-Minute Vocabulary Report for Cassava

Cassava is grown for its enlarged starch-filled roots which contain about 30% starch and very little protein. Roots are prepared much like potato. They can be peeled and boiled, baked, or fried. The roots are also a source of tapioca. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Cassava	Vocabulary Words in Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (21–68) ▪ RUF Revolutionary United Front (21) ▪ RPG machine guns (24) ▪ AK-47s (24) ▪ G3s (24) ▪ Okra (29) ▪ Palm oil (29) ▪ Cassava (30) ▪ Iman (46) ▪ Yams (56) ▪ Groundnut (62)

words, as well as an example for one word or concept based on the selected pages in Beah's *A Long Way Gone.* After selecting the one word or concept, the student researches the meaning of it, prepares a visual, and gives a one-minute presentation to the class. The student needs to address the following: (1) who or what the word or concept is, (2) when in the book and elsewhere it is important, (3) why it is important, and (4) what its impact is on society (adapted from Glasgow). See Figure 3 for an example report created by Aigerim Amankulova for ENG 451 in fall 2008.

FIGURE 4. Creative Writing Assignment

Directions: How does Ishmael cope with child soldiering? By the time the government military sequesters Ishmael and his friends, he has already lost his family, suffered displacement, witnessed destruction of homes and property, witnessed death, torture, and mutilation, been starved and homeless, threatened at gunpoint, and now he finds himself with 30 other orphaned boys between the ages of seven and sixteen (pp. 100–128). While life in the military village of Yele seemed safe at first, Beah's training as a child soldier soon begins in earnest. Choose a critical moment in Ishmael's life as a child soldier and write a poem from his point of view that captures his feelings, thoughts, worries, and coping mechanisms.

Training

Gunfire rattles overhead
We watch our third Rambo film this week
My head aches and I need more
More marijuana
More *brown-brown*
More violence

I crave the thrill
The suspense of finding the enemy
Of creeping up on him
The hot rush of flowing blood on the edge of my bayonet

The sudden surge of heat from an RPG explosion
Excites me, enthralls me
A smile creeps to my face,
As I see men in flames
Crawling
Trying to survive

I don't need sleep anymore
I just need my gun
And my drugs
And my Squad

God I'm tired...

Creative Writing Assignment

One student prepares a creative writing assignment taken from the assigned pages of Beah's *A Long Way Gone.* The writing may be in any genre such as poetry, letter writing, narrative, song lyrics, etc. See Figure 4 for a Creative Writing Assignment created by Geoffrey Smith for ENG 551 in fall 2008.

Artifact Collection

For this assignment, students must find three artifacts (real objects) that represent something in the assigned pages of Beah's *A Long Way Gone.* After identifying the artifact, students should prepare a rationale for their choices and present the artifacts and explanations to the class. See Figure 5 for an Artifact Collection created by Kendra Williams for ENG 551 in fall 2008.

Socratic Seminar

At least one student in the group prepares the Socratic Seminar Questions for the prescribed pages in *A Long Way Gone.* Like class discussions, Socratic seminars create "a spirit of joint adventure where stu-

FIGURE 5. Artifact Collection for *A Long Way Gone*

Box of Tissues—The tissues represent Ishmael's and other child soldiers' sadness and devastation in terms of losing their families and their innocence. Ishmael had a happy life and friendship with his brother Junior. When that was taken from him by the government army, he was tormented with the idea of finding them again and devastated by his loss. It could also represent the tears of joy he shed when he was adopted into his uncle's family.

Rap Cassette—The cassette represents a distraction for Ishmael and his friends. They memorized the songs and taught themselves to dance like rappers. While the music was a source of enjoyment for the boys and their connection to a world outside Sierra Leone, it was also indirectly related to the drastic change in their lives. They were captured on their way to a talent show to showcase their music and dancing.

Rubber Band—The rubber band represents Ishmael's resilience. During his life of soldiering, he was trained to kill and void of any emotion. But he was rehabilitated and "retrained" to be a civilian and a son living in Freetown. He bounced back from an isolated life of brutality and became a productive member of society.

dents' questions are encouraged and their viewpoints are valued" (Guthrie and Wigfield 164). The Socratic seminar is based on Socrates's idea of the dialectic in which questions are thought-provoking, broad in nature, and allow room for discussion and debate. Three types of questions are recommended. The Opening Questions are designed to connect aspects of the text with the reader's personal experiences. The Opening Questions (choice of 1–3) are the only ones that all participants are required to answer. The Core Questions (6–8) make up the bulk of the seminar and should ask students to interpret a passage, explore a quotation, or examine universal themes. The questions need to be open-ended to provoke discussion. The Socratic seminar ends with the Closing Questions (1–2) that are designed to establish relevance and connections of students to the real world. Students should be able to apply what they've learned in the discussion to their personal lives (adapted from Glasgow and Rice). See Figure 6 for Socratic Seminar Questions for pages 100–151, created by Kendra Williams for ENG 551 in fall 2008.

Ishmael Beah's story, while one of horrific acts of violence, is also one of hope and transformation as he struggles to regain his identity and shed the terrors of his past.

Multigenre Research Project

After reading and discussing Beah's *A Long Way Gone* in class, students write a paper that consists of a series of pieces that prove their understanding and appreciation of the novel and its implications for living. Students will be asked to include everything from expository, persuasive, and narrative writing to artistic pieces such as poetry and painting. Though more topic centered than Tom Romano advises in his book, *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers,* this type of writing assignment provides an alternative to the traditional research paper and allows students interesting ways to make meaning for the social justice issues concerning child soldiering (Glasgow). See Figure 7 for Writing Assignments for Multigenre Research Papers.

Expanding Students' Experience

Powerful literature can transform the lives of our students from one in which they may live blind to the world or alive to its many difficulties and joys. Ishmael Beah's story, while one of horrific acts of violence, is also one of hope and transformation as he struggles to regain his identity and shed the terrors of his past. Learning about his life and the struggle and survival of other child soldiers will surely transform our students' thinking and empower them to seek other rewarding and inspiring opportunities to learn even more about their world.

FIGURE 6. Socratic Seminar for Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (pp. 100–151)

Opening Questions (Respond to one or the other):

- In chapter 12, Lieutenant Jabati tells the military camp inhabitants that they must choose whether to stay and fight the rebels, or leave the base at the risk of being killed by a rebel. Ishmael and his friends are backed against a wall. "We had no choice. Leaving the village was as good as being dead" (pg. 107).

  Have you ever been in a situation where you felt damned if you do and damned if you don't?

  OR

- When Ishmael goes into the forest to fight with his gun for the first time, he says, "I have never been so afraid to go anywhere in my life as I was that day" (pg. 116).

  Can you remember a time when you were utterly terrified to go somewhere or do something?

Core Questions:

- How did Ishmael go from being afraid of a gun to enjoying the kill?
- "Why had the lieutenant decided to give us up to these civilians? We thought that we were part of the war until the end. The squad had been our family" (pg. 129). Why did Ishmael feel betrayed?
- Why was it "infuriating to be told what to do by civilians" (pg. 138)?
- Why did Ishmael resent being told by his rehabilitators that what he had become was not his fault?
- What are some of the traumatic memories that haunt Ishmael in his sleep?

Closing Questions (Respond to one or the other):

- Ishmael was forced to live as a child soldier just to survive, although eventually it became the only life he knew. Does this change your perspective regarding pictures and news stories you've seen of militant children in other countries?
- How can we prevent child soldiering?

FIGURE 7. Writing Assignments for Multigenre Research Papers

1. Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper persuading people to learn more about recruitment and rehabilitation of child soldiers.
2. Write a letter from a father who survived a rebel attack to his village warning his son who is visiting his grandmother in a distant village.
3. Write an original poem by a child soldier reflecting on his situation wishing he could return to his carefree childhood when the family was together.
4. Create an interview with Ishmael Beah based on presentations available on his website.
5. Create a diary entry from a young girl who is now an orphan that explores how she got in this situation. She is worried that her mother may have contacted HIV/AIDS from her days in the war as she was forced to be a sex slave to soldiers.
6. Read about AIDS orphans on the AVERT website and write a creative essay reflecting on some of the issues and consequences of this situation.
7. Browse the UNICEF website and then write a short scene in which you imagine what the UNICEF worker said to the Lieutenant when coming to rescue Beah and other child soldiers (Beah 128–29).
8. Write a poem modeled on Emily Dickinson's "This is my letter to the world" from Ismael Beah's perspective.
9. Create a sketchbook journal entry that Beah could have written as a child soldier.
10. Make a public awareness poster about raising awareness of child soldiering.
11. Make a mask using pictures or words that symbolize Beah's life as a child soldier.
12. Create a book cover or piece of art that provides readers with insights into *A Long Way Gone.*

A LITERATURE ABOUT CHILD SOLDIERS, CHILD SLAVES, AND CHILD REFUGEES: VICTIMS OF AFRICAN WARS

Abani, Chris. *Song for Night: A Novella.* New York: Akashic, 2007. Print.

Abani renders the inner voice of mute 15-year-old My Luck, the boy leader of a platoon of mine sweepers in an unnamed war-torn African country. When he was twelve, the then volunteer rebel had his vocal cords severed (the rest of his team received the same treatment), so that they wouldn't scare each other with their death screams. At the opening of the novella, My Luck awakens after an explosion to find that he has been separated from his unit.

Beah, Ishmael. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier.* New York: Farrar, 2007. Print.

This memoir of a boy of twelve who gets swept up in Sierra Leone's civil war goes beyond even the best journalistic efforts in revealing the life and mind of a child abducted into the horrors of warfare. After wandering around homeless, Beah finds himself in the army in a drug-filled life of casual mass slaughter that lasts until he is 15, when he's brought to a rehabilitation center sponsored by UNICEF and partnering NGOs. The process marks Beah as a gifted spokesperson for the center's work after his "repatriation" to civilian life in the capital, where he lives with his family and a distant uncle. When the war finally engulfs the capital, it sends 17-year-old Beah fleeing again, this time to the United States, where he now lives. (Beah graduated from Oberlin College in 2004.)

Bok, Francis, with Edward Tivnan. *Escape from Slavery: The True Story of my Ten Years in Captivity—and My Journey to Freedom in America.* New York: St. Martin's, 2003. Print.

Seven-year-old Francis Piol Bol Buk was living happily on his family's southern Sudan farm. One day in 1986, he was sent on errands to the marketplace. There, a slave raid ripped him from his contented life and threw him into a wretched existence serving under a northern Sudanese Arab. After he escaped at age 17, Buk made his way to Cairo with a black market passport incorrectly listing his name as Bok and became a UN refugee allowed to settle in the United States in 1999.

Dau, John Bul, and Michael S. Sweeney. *God Grew Tired of Us: A Memoir.* National Geographic, 2008. Print.

Just 13 in 1987 when he was driven from his village and separated from his family in the raging civil war in southern Sudan, John Bul Dau spent years in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, until in 2001 he came to the United States as one of 4,000 Lost Boys of Sudan.

Deng, Benson, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, with Judy Bernstein. *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky.* New York: Public Affairs, 2005. Print.

Raised by Sudan's Dinka tribe, the Deng brothers and their cousin Benjamin were all under the age

continued

A LITERATURE ABOUT CHILD SOLDIERS, CHILD SLAVES, AND CHILD REFUGEES *Continued*

of seven when they left their homes after terrifying attacks on their villages during the Sudanese civil war. In 2001, the three were relocated to the United States from Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp as part of an international refugee relief program.

Dunson, Donald H. *No Room at the Table: Earth's Most Vulnerable Children.* New York: Orbis Books, 2003. Print.

Dunson untangles the many trials that children face by focusing first on abducted child soldiers, then on sexually exploited children, child laborers, hungry children, refugees, and those suffering from AIDS and other preventable diseases. Underlying the book is the philosophical position that all of humanity is connected and that children who suffer and die are our children, and that we share responsibility for them, guilt for their plight, and accountability for their rescue.

Eggers, Dave. *What Is the What?* The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng (A Novel). New York: Vintage, 2007. Print.

Separated from his family when Arab militia destroy his village, Valentino joins thousands of other Lost Boys, beset by starvation, thirst, and man-eating lions on their march to squalid refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, where Valentino pieces together a new life. He eventually reaches America but finds his quest for safety, community, and fulfillment in many ways even more difficult there than in the camps: he recalls, for instance, being robbed, beaten, and held captive in his Atlanta apartment.

McDonnell, Faith J. H., and Grace Akallo. *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children.* Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2007. Print.

In northern Uganda, thousands of children have been kidnapped by rebel armies and pressed into murderous service. Here, Akallo, who was herself kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army at age 15, offers a disturbing, deeply personal account of being forced to march with the rebel army, fight, and raid villages for food and water.

Nanji, Shenaaz. *Child of Dandelions.* Asheville: Front Street, 2008. Print.

Fifteen-year-old Sabine lives a life of luxury with her wealthy Indian family in Kampala, Uganda. Then Idi Amin comes to power and things change quickly. All British Indians are expelled from the country. Sabine's father thinks they will be safe because they are Ugandan citizens, but they soon discover that they are in serious danger. Sabine's beloved uncle disappears, and her friend Zena, who is African, turns against her because Zena's military uncle has convinced her that the Ugandan Indians have exploited the African populace.

Nazer, Mende, and Damien Lewis. *Slave: My True Story.* New York: Public Affairs, 2003. Print.

Born into the Karko tribe in the Nuba Mountains of northern Sudan, Nazer has written a straightforward, harrowing memoir that's a sobering reminder that slavery still needs to be stamped out. In 1994, around age twelve (the Nuba do not keep birth records), Nazer was snatched by Arab raiders, raped, and shipped to the nation's capital, Khartoum, where she was installed as a maid for a wealthy suburban family. To Nazer, the modern landscape of Khartoum could not possibly have been more alien; she had never even seen a spoon, a mirror, or a sink, much less a telephone or television set. Nazer's urbane tormentors beat her frequently and dehumanized her in dozens of ways. After seven years, Nazer was sent to work in the UK, where she contacted other Sudanese and eventually escaped to freedom. Her book is a profound meditation on the human ability to survive virtually any circumstances.

Stratton, Alan. *Chanda's Wars.* Toronto, Canada: Annick, 2008. Print.

Chanda has been dreaming of civil war, lost children, and rivers of blood. Suddenly the dream is real. Rebel soldiers brutally attack her family's village and kidnap her brother and sister. Risking their lives, Chanda and a troubled young tracker pursue the rebels through the unforgiving bush to save her family.

DVDs on Child Soldiers and Lost Boys of Sudan

Invisible Children. Prod. Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole. DVD. invisiblechildren.com, 2006.

God Grew Tired of Us. Prod. Newmarket Films with National Geographic Films and Lost Boys of Sudan. DVD, 2006.

Lost Boys of Sudan. Prod. and dir. Megan Myland and Jon Shenk. DVD. American Documentary, 2003.

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Tatum, Alfred W. *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Adolescent Males.* Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2009. Print.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

In "Gaining Background for the Graphic Novel *Persepolis*: A WebQuest on Iran," students work in small groups to research a specific topic related to Iran, using a WebQuest to focus their research on relevant and reliable information. The graphic novel *Persepolis* is set in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. Most students are unaware of the changes associated with the events during that time, but the repercussions of the revolution are still being felt throughout the world. Gaining background information on Iran helps students appreciate more fully the experiences of Marjane, the main character of *Persepolis.* After the research is complete, students present their information to the class through a technology-enhanced presentation. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/gaining-background-graphic-novel-1063.html

David L. Bruce

Framing the Text: Using Storyboards to Engage Students with Reading

Having students create visual storyboards for literature and movie scenes can improve students' reading skills. Specific classroom projects are described and student-created examples are shown.

Storyboards deliver a narrative through discrete visual representations. I have used storyboards in a variety of ways in my high school classrooms as well as with my work in teacher education. During the eleven years I taught high school, I primarily used storyboards as planning tools for student work in composing videos for my media production courses. Storyboards allowed the students to visualize the images prior to videotaping. I found this to be a helpful brainstorming activity because it engaged them in thinking about how they wanted to frame their images. Since students were dealing with time constraints for their videotaping, storyboards helped them work more efficiently because they already had planned the visuals for their project.

The purpose of the storyboards was always to *scaffold* the final product and students were free to add, delete, or adapt those images that were most helpful to their project. The storyboards served as a brainstorming activity, much like a prewriting exercise for a written paper.

However, while storyboarding worked well as a prewriting activity for composing videos, I also found that storyboards could be adapted to a number of other classroom applications. As students composed storyboards, they were actually reading them, too. In writing their storyboards, they became more astute readers of visual texts. I began to see connections with storyboards for reading other texts as well.

Storyboards are hardly a new concept. In an adapted form, they are part of the comic pages in daily newspapers, in comic books and graphic novels. In filmmaking, directors from Hitchcock to the Coen brothers have used storyboards to detail the developing vision of their work. Storyboards have even found their way into use in corporate and business communications.

It is not much of a stretch to see how storyboarding could be used in a similar manner in a classroom, especially as it is a low-tech multimodal activity that requires only paper and a writing utensil. In this article, I describe three reading activities using storyboards. The first deals with focusing on images in poetry, and the second pertains to using storyboards with reading works of fiction. The third activity details reading film passages.

Why Storyboards?

Storyboards help readers visualize a print text. We know that in teaching reading, a key element of reading a print text is the ability to visualize the reading (Beers 45), something Jeffrey D. Wilhelm calls "seeing the visual possibility" (117). Creating storyboards becomes a way of *re-presenting* the students' thought processes, detailing a visual record of their reading.

Another reason storyboards are effective with reading is that their use requires students to interact with the text. In the process of composing storyboards, students will often go back and forth between the text they are reading and the visuals they are creating. One problem with reading is that it is often seen by students, particularly reluctant

readers, as a passive activity (Smith and Wilhelm 10–11). Creating storyboards encourages students to engage and interact—or in a reader-response term, *transact*—with the text.

Storyboards can also assist with the difficult task of assessing reading. Since reading is an internal process, a difficulty exists for the classroom teacher in diagnosing how students are progressing. When students compose storyboards while reading, the visuals become an artifact of their reading, detailing their interpretations of what is being read. Student understandings (or misunderstandings) of the reading are made explicit because teachers can see a visual record of the students' reading.

The activities described below take active advantage of the benefits afforded by storyboards.

Activity #1: Interpreting Poetry with Storyboards

Since poetry invokes images through language, beginning with identifying and envisioning those visuals is a crucial place to start. I have found that using storyboards is a disarming way of reading, visualizing, and discussing a poem because storyboarding is a nonprint activity that compels a transaction with the text by creating a focus on the language and imagery. The activity centers on students finding images in the poem and then representing those in graphic form.

When introducing storyboarding with poetry I begin with Billy Collins's "Introduction to Poetry." This poem uses imagery with a series of senses and is well-suited to focusing the readers on poetic images.

Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to water-ski
across the surface of the poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means. (16)

In this activity, I have students select and storyboard four to six images from the poem. Although the exercise can be done with regular pens and pencils, I try to have markers, crayons, and/or colored pencils available to allow the students to represent color as well.[1] Students are given 20 to 30 minutes in which to engage the poem. I encourage them to not worry about their artistic ability. Rather, the focus is on capturing a specific image, the shape, or color of their idea.

When students compose storyboards while reading, the visuals become an artifact of their reading, detailing their interpretations of what is being read.

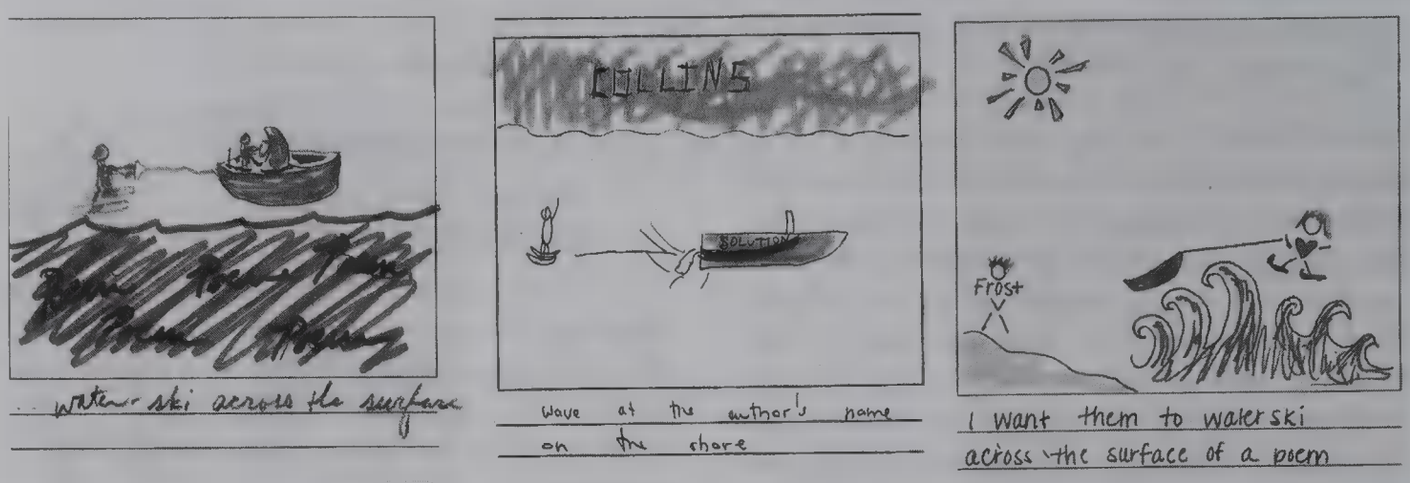
After they have created their storyboards, I ask students to share one of their images. Since the poem is relatively short, many students will have overlapped in their choice of visuals. The conversation that typically ensues is a rich exchange about how different students envisioned an image from the poem, often focusing on the variations of how they visualized the same image. Having students evaluate their different readings of the images often offers interesting conversations for interpreting the poem without, in Collins's words, "beating it with a hose."

For example, in one class in which I used this poem, some students drew visuals about the lines "I want them to water-ski / across the surface of the poem / waving at the author's name on the shore." In the storyboards (see fig. 1) each of the representations share similarities but also differences. They all have some representation of a boat and water-skier. However, the perspective of each varies and those differing perspectives encourage a multifaceted exploration of the poem's image.

In the first storyboard, the author's name has prominence, highlighting the interaction between

Billy Collins, "Introduction to Poetry" from *The Apple That Astonished Paris.* Copyright © 1988, 1996 by Billy Collins. Reprinted with the permission of the University of Arkansas Press, www.uapress.com.

FIGURE 1. Storyboards from "Introduction to Poetry"



reader and poet with the boat providing the solution to the poem. In the second storyboard, the reader has a heart and the poet has both body and name. They are on the same horizontal plane, representing what the student explained as "equal participation" between the two participants. She further detailed that the water, shown with deep waves, represented the dynamic nature of a poem. The third storyboard emphasizes the reader only (no author) skimming over the watery depth of the poem.

By drawing his or her understanding of the poetic image, each student creates a visual that is distinctly his or her own. Sharing those similarities and differences allows for a rich examination of how the students envisioned meaning in the poem.

What is interesting in the images is not the correctness of interpretation but how the student chose to represent the lines from the poetry. By drawing his or her understanding of the poetic image, each student creates a visual that is distinctly his or her own. Sharing those similarities and differences allows for a rich examination of how the students envisioned meaning in the poem, without the conversation ever digressing into the "correct" interpretation of the poem.

Collins laments that readers want to interrogate rather than explore poems, and in the process beat the life out of them. In discussing this concept, I often use the contrasting methods of studying butterflies. One way is to observe them in their habitat, closely following their movements. The other way is to splay them, pinned to a corkboard. With the former, the butterfly is still alive at the end of the observation. In the latter, it is dead. Storyboarding with images from the poem is a way for the students to engage in a close reading of a poem without sucking the life out of it.

Activity #2: Storyboarding Works of Fiction

In the process of teaching a novel, it is not unusual for a number of the students in a class to read summaries of a text—such as CliffsNotes or SparkNotes—in addition to or in lieu of the assigned work. What is the teacher to do when some students have read the text, some have read a synopsis of the text, and others have never cracked the book? In such a scenario, the easy default is to conduct teacher-led summary discussion of "what happened" in the novel.

I have found that using storyboards in conjunction with assigned reading helps mitigate this frustrating scenario and becomes a way for students to think critically about a text. In using storyboards with works of fiction, I detail several activities including variations on chapter summaries, identifying story elements, and comparing print and film interpretations of a passage.

Variations of Chapter Summaries

In the following exercise using storyboards, students are assigned to visually re-create key events in the chapter. Students search the print text for those items that they believe are important and then translate that portion of print into a visual statement. In

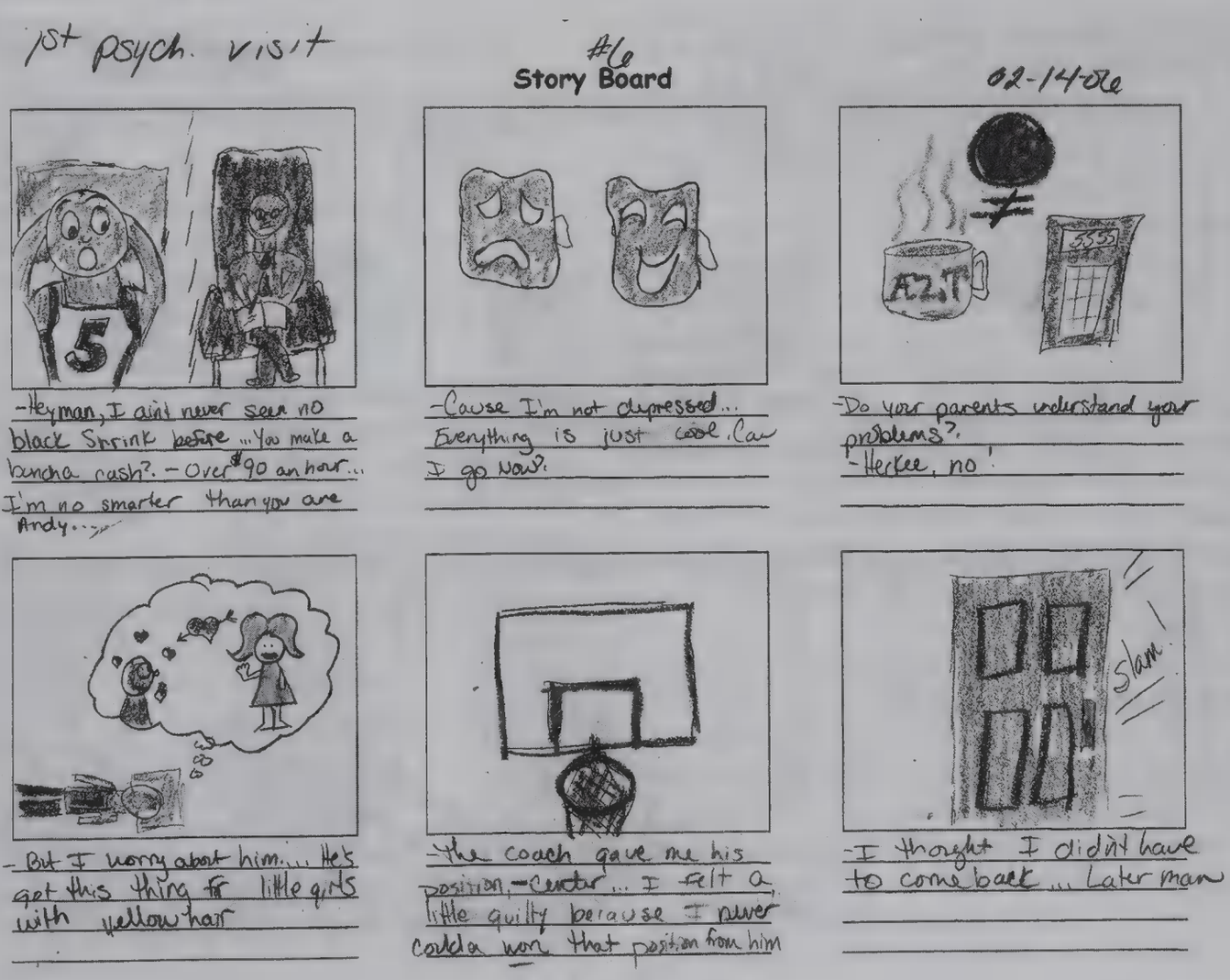
addition to the pictures, students are responsible for including corresponding quotes and documenting the page numbers. The captions are as important as the visuals, as this is a good introduction for students finding and citing significant quotes from the text.

After students have completed their storyboards, they are encouraged to share with their classmates what they have found. Again, as with the previous exercise with poetry, students often storyboard similar events in the chapter. The discussion that ensues is often a rich interchange of how they visualized the events, focusing on the surprising commonalities and variations of individual interpretations.

For example, I had my students read *Tears of a Tiger* by Sharon Draper. Rachel composed a storyboard of a character's first visit to a psychologist (see fig. 2). Rather than provide a series of the chapter's sequential events, Rachel's interpretations are representations of issues and feelings that the character was relating in his counseling session. For example, in the second frame of her storyboard the character's mood is depicted symbolically through the icon of dramatic masks rather than through a literal depiction of the scene. Rachel's interpretation is that the character is hiding his true feelings, which she chose to draw through the symbol for drama. The other students thought her simple portrayal effective, conveying the sense of the character's mood effectively through the brief images. Rachel's drawings also highlight how artistic ability is less important than choices about how to portray the material. Though the visuals are rudimentary, they capture the essence of what is occurring in the story and provide an interpretation of the events as well.

A variation of using this storyboard activity for chapter summaries is dividing the chapters among the students in the classroom. Each student is responsible for highlighting the key events of the chapter by composing visuals and then sharing them

FIGURE 2. Storyboards of *Tears of a Tiger*



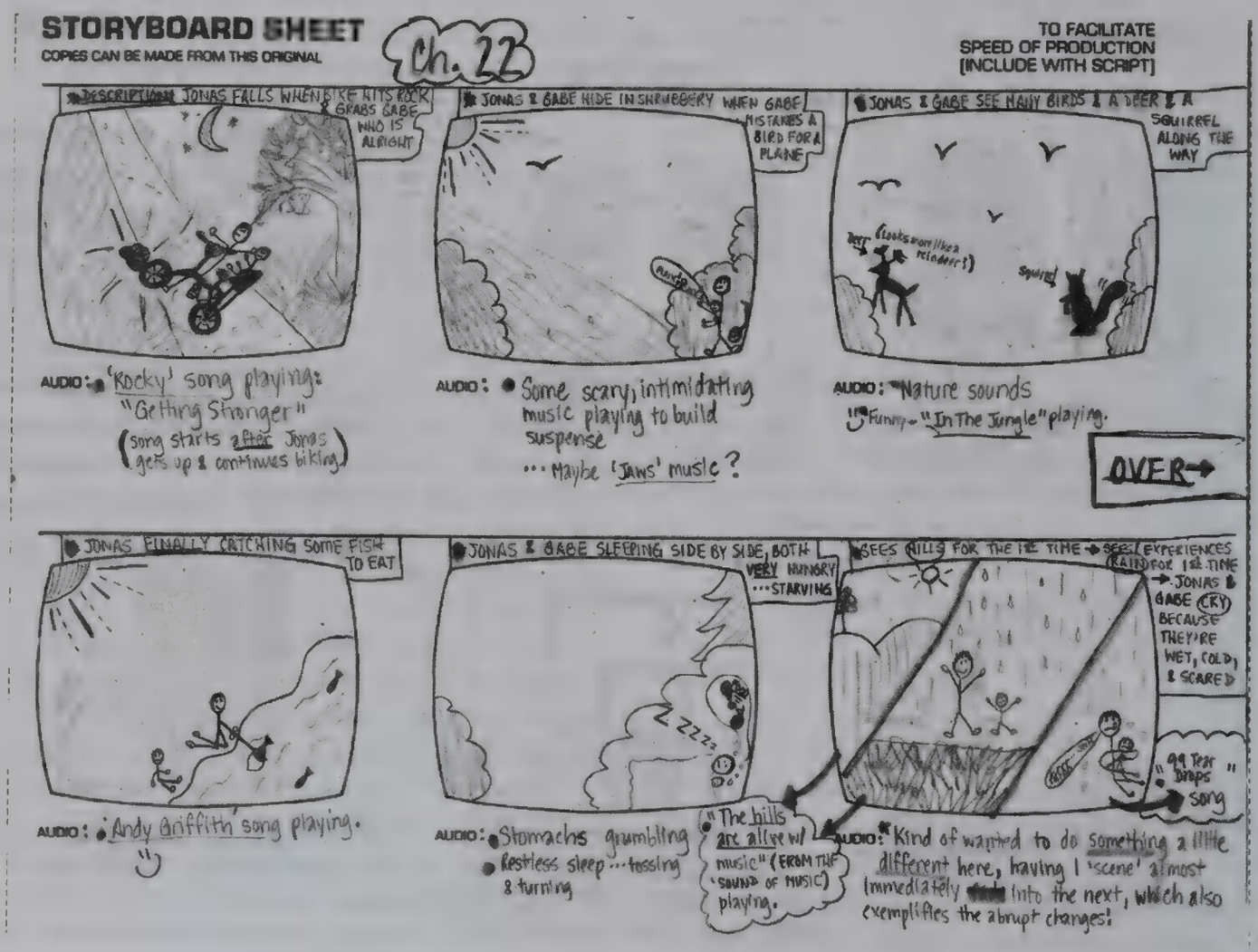
with the class. The series of storyboards becomes an important class artifact. I post the chapters on the bulletin board—or, in the past several years, to a course-related website—as the students progress through the book, forming a class-designed graphic novel. In creating a visual overview, the chapter storyboards form a documented trail through the book in which each student has made a valuable contribution. This is especially important when reading longer texts, as the visuals provide a reminder of the events that have occurred in the proceeding chapters. The storyboard wall—classroom or virtual—can also be used as a review session.

I have found that using the chapter summary approach with shorter novels can also be a rich way to talk about the text in a non-coverage manner. For example, in teaching Lois Lowry's *The Giver,* I assigned the book to be read before we discussed it in class. Each student was assigned a chapter in which he or she was to storyboard six key events. In addition, students were to include key quotes or a song that would work well with the text.

On the assigned day, students brought their storyboards to class (see fig. 3). We sat in a large circle and the students shared the events and visuals from their chapters. In one class period, we reviewed the entire book, and the discussion was led entirely by the students.

Angela's storyboard chapter of *The Giver* is a good example for two reasons. First, her inclusion of song titles allowed her to make intertextual connections between music with which she was familiar and relate it to the book. Selecting music affords interpreting the figurative tone of the scene with the aural tone of a song. The second reason is that her storyboards demonstrate that even roughly drawn stick figures can be used effectively to convey events in storyboards. This is important because I have found that students who do not enjoy drawing in any form experience some apprehension about shar-

FIGURE 3. Storyboard Chapter of *The Giver* by Lois Lowry



ing their work because they feel their visuals are too badly drawn. Emphasizing the shape or essence of a scene is often more important than artistic detail.

Identifying Elements of a Story

Another way of using storyboards with works of fiction is to provide the class with storyboard templates that have the various components of the story cycle labeled under each frame (for example, setting, conflict, rising action, climax, denouement). This activity works especially well with short stories. While students read the text, they are to create a visual—with documented quotes from the story—detailing their understanding of the story elements. This activity puts the responsibility for making textual choices on the students as they search the reading for the structural aspects of the story. Again, the storyboards become the prompt for class discussion, particularly the students' understanding of each story element as it relates to the text. Using storyboards in this fashion also becomes an easy way for assessing students' ability to identify various story elements.

Comparing Text and Film Interpretations

Another use for storyboards with fiction is to assign all the students to storyboard a single key passage of a text rather than a chapter or large section. I encourage students to compose their visuals as if they were directing a scene in a movie complete with visual and audio cues. Students are compelled to translate textual cues into a series of visual and audio re-presentations.

I follow this activity by showing a film version of the textual passage. For example, I have had students storyboard a section from *Hamlet* act 3, scene 3, particularly focusing on Hamlet overhearing Claudius's prayer. Following a discussion of their directorial choices, I show several different cinematic versions of this scene (Almereyda, Branagh, and Zeffirelli) that offer varied interpretations. As students are already familiar with the scene, the class is eager to see how professional directors chose to interpret the text.

Activity #3: Deconstructing Film

The third way I have used storyboards with my students is in conjunction with reading film. Using movies is a standard feature in many ELA classrooms,[2] whether using the film adaptation alongside reading the written work or showing a film as an intertextual comparison with a class text (for example, showing scenes from *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* with *The Odyssey*).

Deconstructing a scene from a movie using storyboards allows students to pay close attention to the elements of a film by breaking a scene down into the component pieces of camera, editing, and various audio cues (score, voiceovers, dialogue, ambient sound, and audio as special effects). A deconstruction offers the chance for students to deeply interact with a movie clip through reading the component parts of a scene.

Students who do not enjoy drawing in any form experience some apprehension about sharing their work because they feel their visuals are too badly drawn. Emphasizing the shape or essence of a scene is often more important than artistic detail.

Setting up this activity requires a bit of scaffolding. I begin by asking the class to watch and listen closely to a scene. After viewing the clip (usually a short but complete sequence containing a narrative arc with a beginning, middle, and end), I ask: What particular visuals stood out to you? What did you notice? What did you hear?

After a brief discussion, I divide the class into five groups, this time having each group focus on a particular aspect of the scene. One group counts the edits (every time the scene changes is an edit); one looks for how the camera is used; another listens for audio cues; another pays attention to transitions; and the last group looks for color and special effects.[3] We then watch the scene a second time. Afterward, I give the groups a brief chance to talk with one another to discuss their individual impressions before sharing as a class. Each group then presents its findings. The conversation following the second viewing produces a much richer discussion of the film text by focusing on the various layers of the scene. The class invariably ends up analyzing how complex, how constructed the scene is. Students notice nuances that were missed on the first viewing. We conclude the discussion with the question of *how* the scene's various components worked together for the overall effect.

After the whole-class exercise, their individual assignment is to select a scene from a film appropriate for classroom viewing or tied to the unit of study. I provide them with storyboard templates (http://xinsight.ca/tools/storyboard.html) and the instructions (see fig. 4). A variation is to assign students different scenes from the same film, potentially a film adaptation used alongside a class reading. By doing so, the class will share a number of different scenes from the film without anyone having the burden of doing too much.

I tend to use this activity early on in the sequence of the class, as this exercise provides a foundation for talking about film throughout the rest of the course. Using storyboards, students can visually represent their understanding with pictures and written audio cues for how they would provide a cinematic interpretation of the text.

Encouraging Multiple Interpretations

I have offered here a variety of ways to capitalize on students' visualization of text and the capacity for students to interact with a passage in a nonprint mode. These three activities using storyboards—finding images in poetry, visualizing scenes from print texts, and analyzing a sequence from a film—are inviting ways to engage students with the visual aspects of reading texts. Each of the activities has a number of different possible alternatives for classroom use.

As with any classroom exercise, storyboarding is not a reading panacea. Part of the appeal is the novelty of using visuals to provide an interpretation of a scene. Like any good activity, storyboarding can be overused to the point where the students dread it. I spread the various storyboard exercises over the

FIGURE 4. Scene Deconstruction Assignment Handout

Scene Deconstruction

You are to take one scene from a movie and break it down for its component parts. The point of this exercise is to closely read a scene, examining the parts that make it up (sound, camerawork, editing, transitions, acting, etc.) to see how the parts make the whole better. In selecting a scene, make sure that it is not too long (many students select scenes between 30 seconds and one minute) as you will be drawing a storyboard of each edit in the scene. In your selections, also be mindful that the clip has a discernable beginning, middle, and end. In your analysis you do not need to address every one of the following, but please keep these in mind:

- number of edits
- camera angles/camera work/camera movement (zoom, tilt, pan/combo)
- establishing/reaction/perspective shots
- sound effects
- score
- acting/writing/directing
- transitions
- lighting/color
- special effects

Directions:

1. Describe what the scene is about in one paragraph.
2. Storyboard the scene. If the scene has 15 edits, you will need to sketch 15 panels. Don't worry about being perfect. Capture the essence of the visuals. Note that if a scene is a repeat (for example, a conversation going back and forth between characters) you do not need to sketch the same shots over and over. Simply number the panels to indicate that the edit is a repeat of an earlier image.
3. If you do not feel like you are good at drawing, notice the shape of the images on the scene (perception, depth, where the characters and/or background is placed) and try to re-create that. Stick figures are perfectly acceptable, as is the use of color in your drawings.
4. Underneath each storyboard panel, list the type of shot being used (establishing/reaction/perspective—or a combo of the three). List any particular camera shot you notice. Also note any sound/music cue.
5. Write *how* the components of the scene make the scene work. In other words, how does the combination of types of shots, camerawork, and sound create meaning in the scene? (one to two paragraphs).
6. You will end up watching the scene a number of times. You will need to allow enough time for repeated viewings and drawings of the scenes. Use the pause button liberally!

course of a class, allowing students to become familiar with the process and to have a variety of opportunities using storyboards with different readings.

In using storyboards, students learn a strategy that allows them to closely read a text. The activity provides an alternative, particularly for those visual learners, to show their understanding of a text in graphic rather than written form. I have often found that even when not using a storyboarding activity for a class text, students who have worked on storyboarding in the past will use the languages (visual, cinematic, musical, and transactional) they have learned from those activities.

Most importantly, by providing a way for students to see how others read and understand texts, storyboarding helps students learn that interpretations are not fixed. Rather, they are subjective and mutable, and readers can interact with texts in a number of ways.

Notes

1. Images here are reproduced in grayscale, but the students' original drawings are in color.

2. For ideas for using film in an ELA classroom, see Costanzo; Golden; Krueger and Christel; and Teasley and Wilder.

3. An alternative to this activity is to use a narrative commercial. In analyzing a commercial, another element to pay attention to is text usage (the fonts, colors, language being used). A commercial is brief (most often, 30 seconds) and has a discernable beginning, middle, and end.

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION — **Lisa Storm Fink, RWT**

Read more about using storyboards in the ReadWriteThink.org lesson plan "Framing the Text: Using Storyboards with Reading," also written by David Bruce. http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/framing-text-using-storyboards-30750.html

Mentoring Matters

In the story that follows, Mary G. Powell traces the progress of one English teacher from her days as a middle school student, to her university work, to her emergence as a teacher. The journey reveals that many mentors along the way contributed to the new teacher's sense of purpose, efficacy, and confidence. It is easy to limit our thinking about the concept of mentor as the cooperating teacher during student teaching or the assigned mentor teacher during the first year of teaching. In contrast, Dana's journey traces the influences of many mentors, from grandmother to cooperating teacher. The story celebrates the contributions of many and suggests the vulnerability of prospective teachers, who might be discouraged rather than encouraged, who could be distracted rather than inspired.

Many Voices, Many Choices: Women Who Mentored and Inspired Dana Rodriguez

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Many experiences mold people into who they become. As much as we would like to trace who is responsible for our successes and our failures in life, the issue is complicated. Who can measure how much goodness a person contributes to another individual? For that matter, how can we assess how much we have contributed to another's successes? Mentoring is an intricate web of experiences that is woven and broken continually. Teachers are part of this web as they frequently come into contact with people who may or may not influence their instruction for the better. A supportive teacher education program, thoughtful principal, and kind teacher-peer can all make a difference in a novice teacher's life. Additionally, teachers' identities are molded by those people they associated with before they entered the teaching profession. Marian Webb studied how preservice secondary education instructors' identities were formed, and she discovered that new teachers negotiate their identities based on their teacher education programs and the context of their schools. Webb's most interesting finding, however, reveals that teachers' personal domains of "resilience, boundaries and ongoing formation of values" affects them just as much as their professional spaces. Thus, teachers are an amalgam of their personal experiences from their past and present (Beauchamp and Thomas; Day et al.; Lynn; Nevin et al.). The stories that teachers live by, including key "characters" within that story, such as family members, friends, and community members also play a crucial role in shaping who they become (Connelly and Clandinin; Huber and Whelan). The story of one of my students, who was to become my student teacher, is no exception. Four women in Dana's life inspired her desire, passion, and drive for teaching English. This article details the story of that process. I would like to thank Dana for granting me permission to share her story. To respect her confidentiality, and that of her family's, I have used pseudonyms throughout this article. I hope that by sharing her narrative with you, you may remember those people who have shaped who you are and may learn more about how you have inspired others.

Dana's Successes

Dana is a Latina who grew up and lives in an urban, impoverished neighborhood in South Phoenix. I first met her when she was in my ninth-grade reading class, the summer before her ninth-grade year. By the time she was in my class, she was already

a hard worker. She earned A's in my English classes and was on our Academic Decathlon Team, often taking first place in competitions. Later, she attended a local university with full scholarships, determined to become an English teacher. But Dana had not always been successful. She was a rarity in her family and in her community.

Dana was the first of 20 cousins to attend college. She also was one of the few women in her family who had not become pregnant in high school or involved with gangs. I asked Dana why she had been successful in school when the majority of her family members had not. She credited two women in her life who were responsible for her achievements and two other mentors, including myself, who made her education a possibility. These women built a multilayered protective "shield" around Dana that supported her throughout her childhood and teenaged years.

Dana's Grandmother: The First Source of Light

"Nana was so determined. She would always say, 'You're not going to give up on yourself. You're going to college!'"

Dana's grandmother had plans to attend college when she was a teenager. She met her future husband in high school and became pregnant shortly after graduation, so she never made that dream a reality. When her high school sweetheart and husband cheated on her, she divorced him. To support her three children, she worked a factory job at Motorola. She was determined that her two daughters and her son, Dana's father, would receive a formal education. Later, Dana's mother became pregnant at the age of 14. When Dana's grandfather found out, he threw Dana's mother, Angelica, out of the house. So Dana's grandmother, or "Nana," took Angelica in and supported her. She took care of Dana while Angelica attended high school and while Angelica earned an associate's degree in nursing.

When I asked Dana to describe "Nana," she explained, "Her hands were so beautiful and strong. For their strength, they were very feminine at the same time. She was just a strong woman, in everything." Interestingly enough, Dana's grandmother did not want her to become a teacher. Dana reported, "She was a strong woman but she could hold a grudge. If she had an opinion on something she would tell you; it didn't matter what it was. When I was growing up, she did not like the fact that I was becoming a teacher. She's like 'they don't make enough money. You'll be a doctor or a lawyer.' And she was determined that that's what I was going to be." Dana explained that her grandmother taught her that she did not need a man to be successful and that women must obtain their educations if they are going to be successful. Unfortunately, Dana and her father have not kept in touch.

Dana's Mother, Angelica: An Additional Illumination

Dana's mother was successful because of the emotional and financial support that Dana's grandmother had provided her. So often, those who are mentored "pay forward" what they learn from others. Dana's mother did this for Dana. Although they lived in poverty, Dana's mother made certain that Dana and her brother Michael lived fulfilling lives and enjoyed the same privileges as those children whose parents had more money.

Dana explained, "When she was working, she would look for all these places for us to go that were free and fun, like October Fish. Every October, they had a fishing party at any of the parks with lakes. You didn't even need a fishing license to fish. They had raffles and face paintings. And she got me into River Rampage [in] which I [rafted down] the Colorado River for a week with a bunch of kids who are 'at risk.' I've been camping and my brother's been camping to these nice, expensive places that she found scholarships for us to get in and go to." Dana appreciated the sacrifices that her mother had made for her so that she could have these valuable experiences.

So often, those who are mentored "pay forward" what they learn from others. Dana's mother did this for Dana.

Today, Dana's mother is her greatest support. Dana lives at home with her mother and is pursuing a master's degree in counseling with the goal of becoming a high school guidance counselor. Dana explained that just as her mother worked to get her scholarships, she too will do the same for her 15-year-old brother. She also talks to her younger cousins about the importance of attending college and receiving an education.

For Dana, it is important that she pass on the lessons she learned from her Nana and her mother to future generations.

Reading into a Bright Future

Dana's Nana and her mother, Angelica, were great sources of support to her, but she often felt uncared for by her teachers until she met Mrs. Sanders, her fifth- through eighth-grade librarian.

> It was winter and the bus would come extremely early, or my mom would drop me off early . . . and it was cold and the cafeteria wasn't open. . . . So I decided to look for a place that would shelter me from this cold. And the only place that was open was the school library. . . . I went in there [the library] and just sat down and waited for the cafeteria to open, and she was there. It took a while before she even started talking to me. She noticed I kept coming in and she was like "why don't you read a book?" She gave me a book . . . titled *The Last Book in the Universe* [Rodman Philbrick, Blue Sky, 2002]. And then I started looking at other types of books that I might have to read 'cause I enjoyed that one.

With the assistance of Mrs. Sanders, Dana developed an interest in reading. She discovered that she enjoyed fantasy and poetry books that provided a means of escape for her while she contended with her mother's growing battle with multiple sclerosis and the poverty within her community. School was difficult for Dana during this time because she bore the responsibility of helping her mother cope with this debilitating disease.

During her eighth-grade year, Mrs. Sanders surprised Dana with a letter. It contained Mrs. Sanders's contact information. She told Dana to give the letter to her mother to hold for safe-keeping, and that once she had graduated from high school, she would pay for her college books. "She [Mrs. Sanders] was the first person outside [of] my family who believed that I could make something of myself."

Dana Shines Her Light on Me

I did not know that I too had played a role in Dana's successes. Once Dana began student teaching with me, we conversed about her hardships and successes. Through our conversations, she revealed some powerful ideas about my role in her life as a teacher and a mentor. Dana explained that I was different from her other teachers because I was the first teacher who both cared about her as an individual and challenged her academically. Our relationship inspired Dana to choose teaching English as her profession: "I want to be like you, I do, someone who challenges their students but is willing to see them as more than just a body in a chair." When I had taught Dana as a ninth grader, seven years prior, I had no idea if what I was teaching her made an impact on her, let alone inspired her to want to be a teacher. As teachers, we never know how we may touch our students' lives.

When I had taught Dana as a ninth grader, seven years prior, I had no idea if what I was teaching her made an impact on her, let alone inspired her to want to be a teacher.

During the spring 2010 semester, Dana co-taught three of my twelfth-grade classes during her student teaching internship. We planned lessons and created curriculum together, but our relationship was so much more than that. Dana and I were friends; we cared about each other. I helped Dana learn the ropes of being a novice language arts teacher, and she allowed me to see that I made a difference in students' lives. Dana cheered me on as I attended graduate classes at night, pursuing my PhD in English education so that some day, I could teach teachers in undergraduate teacher education programs. During that semester, I passed my comprehensive exams and am now working on my dissertation proposal. Today, Dana and I both acknowledge that we cannot "assess" what makes a great mentor, nor can we say for certain what allowed for her to succeed while many of her family members and friends fell through the cracks of the educational system. But we have a feeling about what helped. All people, whether students, parents, teachers, or librarians, need to feel valued, appreciated, and supported. Once they feel that way, inevitably, they pass that kindness on to others and serve, formally or informally, consciously or subconsciously, as mentors to others.

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Mary Powell has taught high school English in Phoenix, Arizona, for ten years and is a PhD student in the English department at Arizona State University. She thanks all her students and mentors past, present, and future for the love and knowledge they have given her.

Advice, Unsolicited

Dear girl, the letter you gave me to mail
appeared improperly sealed, insufficiently
licked and in my judgment
looked about to pop.
It would have been a shame to let
the letter or whatever was inside
wiggle out and settle into
no place piled high with dry
and brown and brittle things like
wind-blown leaves, regrets.

So I decided to remoisten it.
In order to do so, I had of course
to open it, and because in my judgment
it could not be personal—evidently
correspondence to the excellent
children's magazine *Highlights*
for Children—I did further
decide or perhaps without thinking
because I am your father, did remove,

unfold and read your very
interesting, concise and neatly written
note, and sent it off
of course but I am sorry I
did that and that
your best friends hate each other
and they want you to take sides,
and that you did not come
to me with this dilemma. Or
perhaps you did and I didn't
think much of it because I am
your father, until I saw it
in writing. What should you
do. In my judgment

you shouldn't take sides. Or go
by me. I don't have such problems.
I go to work, they go away,
they don't. It doesn't matter
unless it's family.

Family's the worst.
You turn to the very
persons who are driving you
mad and have to
stop yourself crying
What should you do.

—Fred Jacobs

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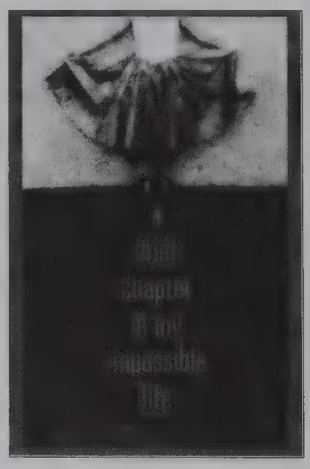
Off the Shelves

Looking for Answers to Big Questions: Religion in Current Young Adult Literature

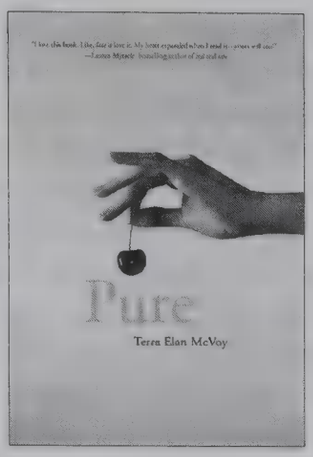
Adolescence can be a tumultuous time for everyone. Changes—physical, emotional, social—come fast and furious, and the search for identity becomes much more pronounced. Part of that identity search is often spiritual; for many young adults, the teen years are a time to ask questions, seek answers, and find a place for themselves within the world. Values and beliefs that are held by parents, extended family, and peers can reinforce or challenge teens, and for some, answers are never clearly revealed, if at all. In the fictional world of young adult literature, some recent titles examine questions of religion. Readers may use these works to understand how others have tackled these personal issues, and perhaps how they can approach the issues themselves. I should make clear that I am not endorsing using these novels to directly teach religion to our students; that is not our role, nor would I want any teacher under my guidance to take on such a personal matter. However, I do think that works such as these can provide useful windows for adolescents who may be thinking about the place of religion in their lives.

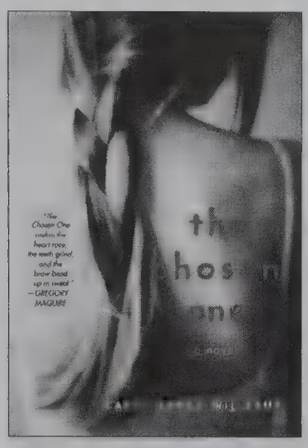
There are countless YA titles that deal, at least tangentially, with religion. Some "classic" YA books such as Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (Dell, 1970), Chaim Potok's *My Name Is Asher Lev* (Fawcett Crest, 1972), and Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved* (Avon, 1980) deal directly with questions of faith, and reading these works again provides an interesting comparison with today's titles, in which teen characters wrestle with essentially the same internal conflicts. However, in some of the titles below, the authors show how religion can affect not only the individual but also a larger circle of people, including family and the community.

Simone, the 16-year-old protagonist of Dana Reinhardt's *A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life* (Wendy Lamb, 2006), has always known she was adopted and yet has never harbored any desire to meet her birth mother. She has a happy and satisfying life, both at home and at school. All that changes abruptly when Simone's parents tell her that her birth mother, Rivka, wants to meet her. While Simone's family is atheist, Rivka is a Hasidic Jew, self-exiled from her family. After some initial resistance, Simone agrees to meet and quickly learns that Rivka is dying of ovarian cancer. In the time they have left together, Rivka and Simone become closer, and their developing relationship challenges Simone's belief in God, a belief that she didn't realize she had. While Reinhardt's debut novel is a story of family, and how *family* can be defined, it is also a beautifully written novel of faith and belief and the ability of adolescents to ask the difficult questions. Simone's questions stem not from a stereotypical sense of teenage rebellion but rather from a genuine search for herself, supported by a loving home environment. Reinhardt handles this tale with sensitive reflection tempered with moments of great humor.



Tabitha, the 15-year-old narrator of Terra Elan McVoy's *Pure* (Simon Pulse, 2009), demonstrates her commitment to abstinence before marriage by wearing



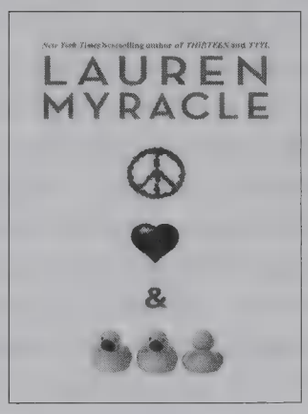


a purity ring, as do her four close friends. When one member of the group confesses to having had sex with her boyfriend, the girls' loyalties are tested, and Tabitha must examine her friendships and her own reasons for wearing her ring. Each of the girls in the group actually wears the ring for their own reasons, and McVoy draws out the distinctions among the friends. McVoy presents readers with the religious and social ramifications of wearing a purity ring while showing the personal struggles that Tabitha faces as she tries to live her faith in the midst of the complexities of friendship. While it would have been relatively easy, I suspect, for McVoy to steer her novel into a sermon on the evils of premarital sex, instead she takes a thoughtful approach to the topic. This is a strong book about what it means to maintain one's values, but it's also, more broadly, about what it means to hold a promise: a promise to friends, to a higher being, and to oneself.

In *The Chosen One* (St. Martin's, 2009), Carol Lynch Williams explores the extreme fringe of religious devotion, taking readers inside a polygamous compound. Thirteen-year-old Kyra has grown up surrounded by a large and loving family, and she views her isolated community unquestioningly as the way things have always been. But she is now approaching the age when she will be expected to become a wife herself, and when she is chosen to be her uncle's seventh wife, she vehemently resists. Her family urges Kyra to accept things the way they are, but Kyra has seen a world beyond the boundaries of the compound. Her maturation is furthered by her relationship with Joshua, a boy also living among the Chosen, and by her visits to the mobile library that travels nearby. But defying marriage to her uncle means defying the Prophet, and "Chosen girls" never defy the Prophet. This is a disturbing read but a rewarding one; without resorting to graphic depictions, Williams examines the incestuous nature of some forced marriages. The strength that develops within Kyra throughout the book is powerful, and Williams lets you see Kyra's movement toward her final decision, step by painful step.

Readers will palpably feel the struggles experienced by Andi Grant, the protagonist of Neil Connelly's *The Miracle Stealer* (Levine, 2010), as her personal beliefs collide with those of her family and neighbors. Andi's six-year-old brother, Daniel, survived a fall down a well shaft when he was a toddler, and since then, the residents of their small Pennsylvania town have come to believe that Daniel is blessed with special powers. Believers begin to credit him with healing the sick, communicating with the dead, and even bringing the fish back to the local lake. Andi cares deeply for her brother, wants him to have a normal childhood, and resents the way her mother and the townspeople seem to exploit Daniel for their own needs. Where others see miracles, she sees adults projecting their beliefs onto a young boy. Above all, Andi worries about the guilt her brother could take on if one day his "powers" fail him. She just wants people to leave Daniel alone. When more believers begin to find their way to the town, Andi must take desperate measures to save Daniel from those who would follow him. This is a taut, suspenseful novel that also carefully explores the nature of Andi's faith and how that faith is repeatedly tested by what she sees, and what remains unknown.

At first glance, the cover and title of Lauren Myracle's *Peace, Love, and Baby Ducks* (Dutton, 2009) would lead a reader to believe that the novel is much lighter than it really is. Myracle is a master at mixing serious topics

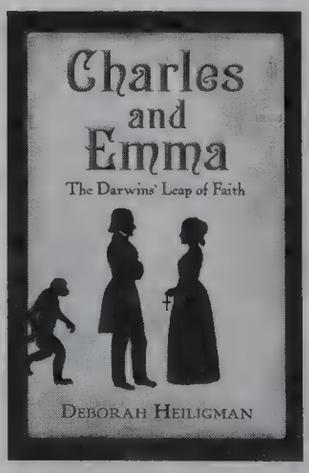


with great humor, and this title is no exception. Fifteen-year-old Carly returns from a summer of volunteer work, self-actualized and aware, to find that her younger sister, Anna, has quickly grown into a ninth grader who attracts all sorts of attention from the boys at their private Christian school in Atlanta. Carly becomes increasingly jealous of her younger sister, and as the school year progresses, their relationship shifts, varying from guardianship and support to vicious fighting. While Myracle nails the sibling relationship in the novel, the links to religion are clear throughout as Carly starts to question her "Holy Roller" classmates after her life-altering summer. Carly sees how some of her friends seem to use religion cynically, as a means to be perceived as good, rather than truly doing good, unselfish deeds. A wonderful novel about sisterhood, *Peace, Love, and Baby Ducks* also proves to be an insightful examination of what it really means to treat others well.

The religious questioning that all teens go through may be intensified for a "PK," or "pastor's kid." Such is the case for 15-year-old Sam, the narrator of Sara Zarr's moving *Once Was Lost* (Little, 2009). Sam used to believe in her stable and perfect family, in the constancy of her friends, and in a loving God who watches over and protects all. Her faith in all of these things is shaken considerably when her mother enters rehab, her pastor father begins to spend suspicious amounts of time with other members of the congregation, and her relationships with her friends begin to change. When the younger sister of her

friend is kidnapped, Sam starts to feel her grip on her faith slip further and further out of reach. From this description, you may think that the novel is overpacked with storylines, but in Zarr's capable hands, these plot lines weave and intersect in ways that flow evenly and cleanly, and Zarr treats her characters, and their flaws, with the intelligence and respect they deserve. In Sam, Zarr has created a character with earnest yet conflicted faith, someone in whom readers can easily see themselves. Sam's ability to find and maintain her faith, even in the face of horrible situations around her, underscores her movement from child to adult, from one who wants to believe to one who truly does.

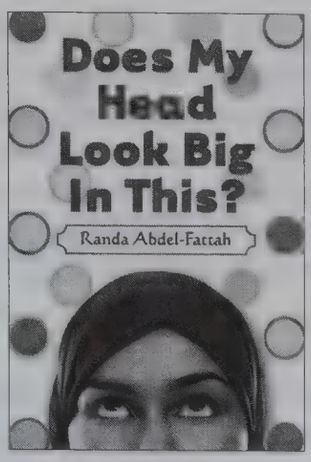
For a nonfiction take on religious faith, Deborah Heiligman's *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith* (Holt, 2009) offers



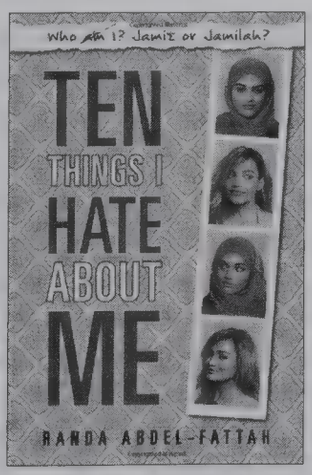
a fascinating perspective on the origin of one of the world's most well-known scientific theories and the role that faith played in its development. Most of us are aware of Darwin's atheistic leanings, but it would be too simplistic to refer to his landmark work as a heretical treatise. Instead, Heiligman's research reveals how Darwin's marriage to the much more devout Emma Wedgwood affected his thinking and the way he adjusted the tone of his writing. Emma, with her tolerant and reasonable faith, served as Charles's first reader and harshest editor, and it's instructive to consider the ways evolutionary theory might be different today were it not for the couple's private conversations about the relationship between science and religion. In the hands of a good teaching team, the interdisciplinary possibilities of this book (coupled with a science unit) are tremendous.

Contemporary young adult literature can also provide excellent opportunities for readers to discover religions and traditions that may differ from their own. Currently, it may be difficult to find a religion that is more misinterpreted and misunderstood than Islam. Polls have shown that large numbers of Americans hold negative views of the religion and may easily conflate Muslims and acts of fanatical violence. Adolescent literature with richly drawn, realistic Muslim characters can counter these perspectives of the Islam faith and reveal to readers the beauty of other cultures.

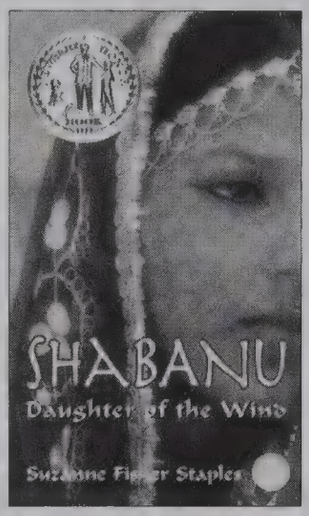
Books such as Randa Abdel-Fattah's offer glimpses of such beauty. In her debut novel, *Does My Head Look Big in This?*

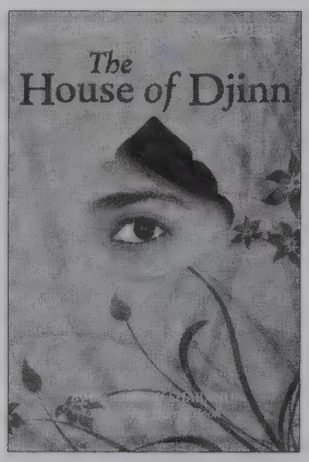


(Orchard, 2007), 16-year-old Amal, a Palestinian, is a devout Muslim who enjoys many of the trappings of modern culture, such as television and texting. When she decides to wear the hijab, the traditional Muslim head covering, full-time, she does it as a means of displaying her deeply felt faith. Yet, she must endure insults and misconceptions of Muslims from other students at her prep school, and she is even refused a part-time job based on the employer's preconceived notions of her religion. Through it all, Amal handles herself with good humor while still remaining a believable teen character. The book strikes a fine balance between the usual high school concerns (boyfriends, social life) and serious issues of faith and culture without becoming preachy. In Abdel-Fattah's second novel, *Ten Things I Hate about Me* (Orchard, 2009), Jamilah attempts to keep her Lebanese-Muslim identity a secret while at school by dyeing her hair blonde, wearing contacts, and looking the other way when her classmates make racist remarks. Prejudice against Muslims abounds in both of these titles, and Abdel-Fattah is to be commended for drawing attention to the ways in which Muslim teens (and all teens) struggle with their identities.

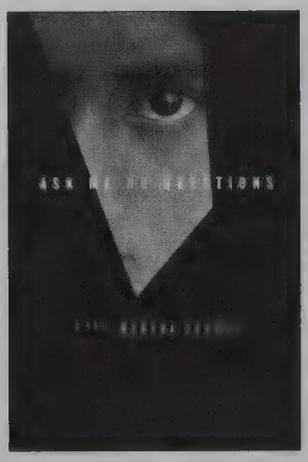


Suzanne Fisher Staples draws on her experiences in South Asia, both as a UPI foreign news reporter and a literacy specialist, to paint portraits of young girls from other cultures, and her books explain and portray beliefs of both Islam and Hinduism. Staples's Shabanu trilogy, including *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind* (Knopf, 1989), *Haveli* (Knopf, 1993), and *The House of Djinn* (Farrar, 2008), traces the life of a young girl in Pakistan. Staples expertly juxtaposes modern culture and notions of love and relationships with traditional tenets of Islam. Younger readers will also enjoy her *Under the Persimmon Tree* (Farrar, 2005), which critically examines the stereotypical image of Muslims as fundamentalist fanatics through the story of a girl forced to move to a refugee camp in Pakistan following a Taliban attack on her village in Afghanistan.





In *Ask Me No Questions* (Simon, 2006), Marina Budhos tells the story of 14-year-old Nadira, who, with her older sister and parents, has emigrated from Bangladesh to New York City in the hopes of becoming legal US citizens. After 9/11, however, immigration regulations are tightened, and the family rushes to Canada for asylum. When Nadira's father is detained at the border with visa issues, she and her sister are sent back to New York and must work together to prevent their family's deportation. Nadira's religion is certainly a major issue in this work, as is the reaction to Muslims immediately following the 9/11 attacks, but at the same time, her background



occasionally feels pushed to the background to further the plot line of immigration.

This raises, for me, an important consideration when looking for books to review for this column, particularly those dealing with Islam. While there are many books that feature Muslim characters, in a number of those titles terrorism, or the threat of terrorism, remains a prominent plot point. While there are certainly many readers who will incorrectly associate all Muslims with terrorists, to constantly invite the comparisons in books seems too easy, even though authors do make efforts to highlight the differences between narrow-minded stereotypes and much truer, more realistic portraits of Muslims. Another point to stress is the sharp discrepancy between the number of YA titles dealing with Christianity in some regard and those dealing with Islam. Readers of YA literature are among the most savvy, discriminating audiences around, and they are ready for excellent titles that give them snapshots of other cultures. Titles such as those in this column are an outstanding start for a reader looking to expand his or her horizons; but there is room for so much more on bookshelves.

Spiritual beliefs are extremely important to many adolescents. Findings of a 2008 study published by the National Study of Youth and Religion reporting on the religious and spiritual lives of American adolescents indicate that while the importance of religion decreases as adolescents age, about half of the adolescents surveyed indicated that their faith was very or extremely important to them (Denton, Pearce, and Smith 22). Young people who are seeking to develop and expand their personal sense of spirituality may find the books listed here helpful. At the same time, they can help adolescents ask meaningful, critical questions about religion and spirituality and how they influence the world.

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Search for a New Editor of *English Journal*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *English Journal.* In July 2013, the term of the present editor, Ken Lindblom, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for her or his first issue in September 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *English Journal* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

Questions? Email kaustin@ncte.org or call 217-278-3619.

Leah A. Zuidema and Jonathan Bush, Editors

Professional Writing in the English Classroom

Good Writing: The Problem of Ethics

How do you define *good writing*? Do you know good writing when you see it? In Leah's professional writing course, college students investigate what "good writing" looks like in their fields of study. They examine writing samples, and they interview professionals in medicine, business, social work, computer science, law, engineering, education, and other fields. The students all ask a version of this question: "How, in your profession, do you know when your writing is successful?" Without fail, at least a few interviewees answer like this: "There's no such thing as a universal definition of 'good' writing. I can't give you a checklist or a formula. The only way to know if your writing is good is to see how your audience reacts to it. If you get the response you're looking for, it's good writing."

As these professionals continue to explain their ideas about good writing, they emphasize some of the same ideas that we emphasized in our first two columns. It's essential, they say, for writers to remember their audience. They argue that good writers anticipate readers' reactions as they shape their content, style, page design, and every other aspect of their writing. In so many words, the professionals say, "If the structure, grammar, and page design are textbook perfect but the audience isn't impressed, the writing has failed."

We agree that it is essential—in any professional writing—to think about the audience's reaction. In fact, one of our main goals is to teach students to use rhetorical tools for influencing their audiences. However, we also recognize that there can be a dark side to this emphasis on audience. If we aren't careful, a single-minded focus on effect and audience can enable an amoral consideration of writing. If we define *good writing* simply as writing that gets the audience to do or think what the writer wants, we fail to take into consideration the needs or well-being of the audience, and we ignore the ways in which writing may hurt others or cause harm. We then lack grounds to critique the sophistry of a deceitful advertising campaign that boosts sales or to condemn a misleading speech that achieves the speaker's goal by unfairly defaming an opponent. If our definition of *good writing* is merely about effect, then we, like so many political pundits, would have to laud the political campaigns that use specious arguments, innuendo, race-baiting, and outright lies to move the polls in one direction or another.

> **If we aren't careful, a single-minded focus on effect and audience can enable an amoral consideration of writing.**

Clearly, we believe that good writing is about more than effect. It's important to add an additional element to our conversation about professional writing and the English classroom: teaching the ethics of professional writing. Thus, we focus in this column on the decision-making process that goes into professional writing and ways to emphasize ethical decision-making in our writing classrooms.

The Importance of "Case"

Professional writing has at its core an emphasis on action and audience. Certainly we want our students to write effectively—to serve their clients, organizations, and corporations well. However, we also maintain that professional writers have an obligation to act ethically and make responsible rhetorical choices. Furthermore, we want our students to understand the *ethos* of writing within a certain profession—the explicit and implicit concepts that guide how professionals act within their profession.

How do we translate these concepts to our students? For lack

of a better solution, we may be tempted to lecture or to assign readings that lecture: "Writers, whatever you do, be honest, aim for clarity, and consider others' needs and feelings." The problem with this approach is its abstractness. It's easy for writers to be honest, clear, and thoughtful when they're reporting positive results to a project manager. But how do writers balance honesty, clarity, and civility when they don't like an idea or situation—and they've been asked to share their feedback in writing? When writing ethically is challenging, lectures alone won't help students to practice what we are preaching.

Ethical principles won't become "real" for student writers unless they are faced with practical, concrete situations. To be truly curious about ethics, students need to face problems that aren't easily solved; they need to be puzzled—to face what we might call ethical dilemmas. While it's important that students face real ethical questions, it's also crucial that they have a safe space in which to do this. It would be poor teaching (and unethical) to place students in situations where their mistakes could end in shame or regret, cause hurt to others, or otherwise result in damage. To create safe situations for students to think practically about ethics, we teach with cases. This method is often used by professional writing instructors (most prominently seen in the popular text *Professional Writing Online 3.0* by Porter, Sullivan, and Johnson-Eilola) and by English educators (e.g., Alsup and Bush; Johannessen and McCann).

A *case* (what some might call a *scenario*) is a structured writing situation in which students take on the role of author/professional. A case places students within an imagined situation and then lets them make the important decisions that lead to action. Writers have to decide what the task entails—and negotiate some ethical issues during the process. A good case goes far beyond assigning a task or requiring a particular genre. Good cases pose problems similar to those that professionals face in the "real world." Effective cases are full of gray areas—and room for discussion, debate, and decision-making. When cases are used in conjunction with writing assignments, they highlight the ethical complexities of genres that might otherwise appear simple, even formulaic.

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Consider, for example, the ethical challenges that accompany one of the most popular professional writing assignments: the résumé with cover letter. At face value, this is a moderately simple project with a straightforward focus—to produce documents that successfully portray the applicant's professional qualifications for a particular position. The ethics required of writers seem clear: to represent their qualifications, background, and professional traits accurately. However, writing accurately is more challenging than it might appear. At its heart, the résumé is a persuasive document, and it can be tempting to push the envelope to increase the effectiveness of the document. One study found that over 50% of résumés include falsified information (Villano); unfortunately, we have witnessed some of these stretches and overstatements ourselves. A tutoring job gets listed as an instructor position; a small class project becomes a community outreach program; a passing grade in a first-year language course morphs into "fluent Spanish"; a student who walked at graduation claims to have a degree in spite of being a few credits short. In an effort to produce an overwhelming narrative of professionalism, candidates exaggerate their experiences. They ask *some* of the right questions to guide their writing:

- What professional experiences, qualifications, and credentials are valued or required for this position?
- Which of my professional experiences, qualifications, and credentials satisfy those requirements?

When we teach with cases, our aim is for students to think not only about these questions but also to think about another pair of questions that is at least as important as the first set:

- What, ethically, can and should be included in the résumé for this position?
- Given my experiences, qualifications, and credentials, where is the line that separates rhetorically savvy communication from unethical exaggeration or manipulation?

Deliberations, Decisions, Debates, Discussions

When we ask students to participate in case-based writing, we place them in rhetorical situations in which they have to name and negotiate these kinds of questions. Take, for example, the case in Figure 1, designed not only to teach the genres of the résumé and cover letter but also to prompt some rhetorical and ethical decision-making. For this particular case, students complete their writing in small groups so that they also have opportunities to discuss and debate their decisions with their peers.

It's not difficult to imagine the kinds of conversations that arise in this case situation. When teams are composing their own documents, they immediately find themselves discussing a complex tangle of decisions. Students have many creative ideas about how to put their applicant's qualifications in the best light and how to craft the structure, style, and page design for documents that will pique the hiring committee's interest in their candidate. However, the stipulation that the winning team will also meet the hiring committee's standards for ethical communication leads students to ask two essential sets of questions:

- What is *ethical communication*? How do we demonstrate it in our writing?
- Are there any specialized guidelines—either written or unwritten—for the ethics of résumé writing in our fictional applicant's line of work? What beliefs or values regarding ethical communication are important to us as writers—and to the members of the hiring committee?

Students deliberate about these questions within their teams as they decide how to shape their application documents. But they also debate their ideas across teams, especially as they present their constructive critiques of others' documents. As their competitive desire to gain the position takes over, students begin to negotiate where the line between the ethical and unethical occurs. In the midst of this negotiation, they have to explain their decision-making process, naming to themselves and each other how their choices are influenced by *ideals,* by *obligations,* and by anticipated *consequences.* (See Ruggiero to learn more about these factors.)

Our students' debates are critical junctures in their learning about the ethics of professional writing. They learn, hands-on, about the temptations inherent in a job-search situation—and about the dangers inherent in stretching the truth—not only to themselves but also to other applicants and to the organization they are applying to join. As they continue to participate in the case, and especially as they hear about (and perhaps disagree with) the decisions made by other groups, most students become interested in more than simply winning the job for their fictional applicant. They also show strong curiosity about *how* to think through ethical matters, and they are interested in what we as teachers can share with them from our expertise.

This exercise makes visible the ethical complications and issues that underlie what at first appears to be a fairly simple activity. Rather than being a rote act of listing qualifications, composing a résumé and cover letter requires writers to identify and enact professional values.

FIGURE 1. A Job Application Case

Each team will write one résumé and cover letter in response to the job description distributed to the class. Your team will receive a unique list of your fictional applicant's experiences and credentials. Each team will also receive at least

- one advantage (such as a personal connection with a member of the hiring committee),
- one disadvantage (such as a grade of Incomplete in a required course), and
- one gray area (such as a volunteering experience that you and your team will have to decide how to describe and categorize).

Your task is to produce the résumé and cover letter that will win you the job. Your prospective employer (me) and the rest of the hiring committee (two human resources managers from our community) will judge which set of application documents is most persuasive. As any hiring team would do, we'll consider how well you match your applicant's experiences and credentials to the position, how effectively you craft your documents, and how successful you are in achieving clear, ethical communication.

A Framework for Action

The concept of ethics in writing and professional communication goes far beyond the limited discussion we presented here. All writing, particularly that in the public sphere, is full of ethical

decisions. Understanding ethics is an essential element to the teaching of professional writing. Whether our students are writing memos, creating presentations, developing advertisements, building persuasive proposals, presenting data, creating public fliers, or writing within or beyond their profession, we want them to recognize their ethical ideals and obligations as professionals and writers—and to use that recognition as a framework for action.

In the case we presented above, we avoided dictating to our students just what "right" and "wrong" meant. This was purposeful. When students are the ones to name the factors that play into their decision-making, they learn to make their decisions consciously and competently. We want to empower students to make their own choices regarding the ethical obligations of each situation. What might appear to be unethical for one situation may be perfectly appropriate for another. Something that should be left out for a résumé for one position may be fine for another. And it isn't our place to dictate just where the line occurs. Just as our students sometimes tell us that there is no such thing as universally *good* writing, there may be no such thing as the universally ethical decision. That said, we want to show our students that ethical decisions, like the rhetorical ones we make in our writing, are complex thought processes that involve consideration, knowledge, and professionalism.

Rather than seeing communication as an amoral act for which the end result is the only metric of success, students need to understand the ethical obligations inherent in professional writing. And this underlies our primary thesis: that professional writing includes much more than success at a certain task. If the task itself is unethical, or problematic, or poorly considered, we want our students to be prepared to think: about the most effective means of achieving success and also about critiquing the task and acting ethically within a potentially unethical situation. In doing so, we are helping to create thinkers who are more than just *good* technicians of print and design, but also *good* writers who can recognize and navigate the ethical dimensions of writing.

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2011 CALL for CEL Award for Exemplary Leadership

This award is given annually to an NCTE member who is an outstanding English language arts educator and leader. Please nominate an exceptional leader who has had an impact on the profession through one or more of the following: (1) work that has focused on exceptional teaching and/or leadership practices (e.g., building an effective department, grade level, or building team; developing curricula or processes for practicing English language arts educators; or mentoring); (2) contributions to the profession through involvement at both the local and national levels; (3) publications that have had a major impact.

Your award nominee submission must include a nomination letter, the nominee's curriculum vitae, and no more than three additional letters of support from various colleagues. Send by **February 1, 2012,** to: Wanda Porter, 47 Puukani Place, Kailua, HI 96734; wandrport@hawaiiantel.net (Subject: CEL Exemplary Leader).

Julie Gorlewski, Editor

Research for the Classroom

Seize the Data: Embracing Information

Reconsidering Data

Data is probably not a term that drew most of us into the profession of teaching English language arts.

The word *data* connotes math, science, and technology: digits and quantifiable units. Data imply objectification—reducing ideas, and perhaps even students and teachers, to products that can be measured and compared. Ironically, however, this conception of data is itself reductive, and it minimizes the richness and potential of data. Data are much more than numbers and widgets; they involve a wealth of complex and nuanced information—there for our analysis and use.

Data surround us. We use facts and figures in our experiences every day: when we decide where to buy groceries (distance, aesthetics, quality, parking) and which brand of peanut butter to purchase (taste, nutritional value, cost); when we determine our exercise regimen (time, enjoyment of the activity, our desire for a guilt-free slice of cheesecake later); and even when we consider the relative merits of a partner (physical appeal, trustworthiness, desire for children, appreciation of long walks on the beach, etc.). *Data* is simply a scholarly word for information—which we can choose to examine carefully, or ignore (often at our own peril).

In the field of education, data are collected incessantly. Public attention, naturally, tends to focus on the data that are gathered, analyzed, and used by large organizations, such as state and federal agencies or foundations. Because they are designed to be vast in scale and politically expedient, these data are comprised primarily of standardized assessment results, which do not consider the social inequities and challenges that our students face (Apple; Dorn; Nichols and Berliner). Teachers know that a standardized test will never measure a student's disposition toward reading or writing. Despite their myriad limitations, published data continuously demonstrate that many teachers and students are failing to meet standardized expectations. Paradoxically, perhaps, data can save us. We cannot control the way data are used by state and federal political leaders. We can, however, control the way we use data in our classrooms: to support what we believe is important. We can control the reforms that occur in our classrooms and, through these actions, we can seek to influence what occurs in the world.

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The effectiveness of data is determined entirely by how it is used. We can use data to reveal and clarify reality or to reinforce what we think we already know. The challenge, as explained by Sharon Begley, science columnist for *Newsweek* magazine, is to avoid "confirmation bias," that is, the human desire to use data to confirm existing beliefs. In a classroom, where teachers face a variety of responsibilities simultaneously, it can be difficult to focus on one piece of data, much less ignore the inclination to attend to information that supports what we believe and discount information that refutes our preconceptions.

A few years ago, in this column, I explained how I had stumbled on an example of this distinction with a piece of data (in this case a "ticket out the door") in my own classroom (Gorlewski). After what I had thought was a particularly effective lesson on iambic pentameter, I collected an index card from each student.

Students were to have written one line of iambic pentameter on these cards. I was certain that the cards would reveal that students had learned the characteristics of this meter (this was my preconception, supported by many bits of data that had emerged during class). Instead, the cards exposed the fact that at least two-thirds of the class did not understand and could not reproduce a line of iambic pentameter—despite having been provided with numerous examples and instructed to memorize one.

For me, this experience crystallized Begley's notion of confirmation bias (although I had yet to read her piece and, therefore, did not have a name for the idea) and reinforced the importance of collecting assessment data to support student learning. I am returning to this topic now because, in this era of increasing standardization and assessment-based accountability, teachers may be urged to overlook their own ability to collect, analyze, and report meaningful data about student performance—even though these data can be far more useful and significant than scores on mandated examinations. In fact, if teachers are to maintain our professional status and resist the well-documented negative effects of standards-based reform initiatives, we must embrace the data in our classrooms.

Finding a Focus

First, the challenges of a good teacher's life must be acknowledged. The demands in terms of time, effort, and emotional and intellectual energy are significant and cannot be minimized. That said, if these challenges become distractions from the work of instruction, they diminish our teaching effectiveness. Using data effectively is an excellent way to focus and improve in any endeavor. To lose weight and increase fitness, we count things: calories (consumed and burned), carbohydrates, and minutes of exercise, for example. To prepare for retirement, we investigate options and calculate current requirements for savings and investment. Achieving goals in our classroom involves a similar type of focus. We could never improve our level of fitness if we didn't have a sense of three things:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we want to be?
3. How will we know when we get there?

It's important to note that there are various ways to answer these questions. "Where we are now" in terms of fitness may involve knowing how many pounds you weigh, what size you wear, how many inches your waist measures, how many miles you can run, or what your body-mass index is. Fitness can also be related to such things as how much water you drink, whether you take vitamin supplements, and whether you visit a physician regularly. Even though these possibilities provide only a fraction of the ways that you might be able to answer the question "Where are we now?" with respect to fitness, it is clear that the range of options can be overwhelming, a reality that often results in paralysis rather than action. These conditions are easily associated with classroom life, where the extent of data around us can be so vast as to seem insurmountable. Unfortunately, ignoring data that we are not *required* to collect means that someone *else* is allowed to decide what is collected, analyzed, and reported.

Using data effectively is an excellent way to focus and improve in any endeavor.

Fortunately, however, much like with a new fitness regimen, the solution is accessible through the application of a cliche: less is more. We are more likely to succeed if we focus on fewer pieces or categories of information. You might want to limit calories and increase activity, but if you also try to monitor and regulate your intake of sodium, protein, vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, and fat, you are likely to fail simply because there is too much information to track. To be used effectively, data must be focused.

Determining Useful Data

Because a classroom learning environment is comprised of human beings, the idea of quantifying useful data can seem impersonal and cold, something better left to district, state, and federal entities. But, as mentioned earlier, we evaluate and act on data with respect to people in our lives all the time, even if we don't formally analyze and report results. (This lack of analysis makes our personal lives rather vulnerable to confirmation bias, but that's a problem for a column in an entirely different journal.) We should view our classrooms, therefore, as a lab overflowing with information. It is our job to figure out how to use that information.

Since our goal is effective instruction, it is logical to begin by identifying our learning targets (that is, *Where do we want to be?*): What skills, knowledges, and dispositions do we hope students will leave our classrooms with? Clear statements of learning targets will focus our data collection and analysis. Examples of effective learning targets include a wide range of possibilities:

- Students will be able to identify two character traits demonstrated by the protagonist and provide evidence from the text supporting each trait in a well-constructed paragraph.
- Students will demonstrate respect and consideration in all classroom activities.
- Students will be able to name a favorite poem and provide an expressive oral interpretation of that poem for the class.
- Students will come to class prepared with all materials.
- Students will be able to debate the ethical merits of one side of a controversial contemporary issue using relevant rhetorical devices.
- Students will be seated and engaged in an opening activity within 30 seconds of the start of class.

As the professional educator on site, it is up to you to determine and prioritize essential learning targets. If you try to accomplish too many, it is likely that none will be achieved.

Establishing the Baseline

Next, we need to engage with data to consider the three questions listed earlier. Answering the question *Where are we now?* requires collecting baseline data, or information that clarifies the current situation. For fitness, it could be my starting weight, size, calorie consumption, or activity level.

Without a starting weight, you can't quantify the pounds you lose. In terms of learning targets, then, data are critical for recognizing teaching effectiveness. Baseline data, like all data, can be collected in a variety of ways, including checklists, surveys, pretests, and anecdotal records. The key, however, is to collect data regarding all affected students. Once an instructional problem has been identified, categories and sources of data will emerge and you can determine which ones will be most suitable for collection and analysis. For example, if students have difficulty developing ideas in writing, your baseline data might consist of a set of essays in which this skill is sufficiently evident. As you work through the instructional process, you will provide multiple opportunities for assessing students' progress toward achieving this instructional target, analyze these assessments, and maintain ongoing records of this process. These acts, as familiar as they seem, exemplify the use of data for research in your classroom.

Be sure to keep in mind that the human tendency toward confirmation bias makes you want to believe that when one student volunteers a correct answer, the whole class understands the concept. Conversely, if 23 of your 24 students are already coming to class prepared with all materials, you may instead decide to focus your efforts on that one "outlier" student (who makes it seem as though the class, as a whole, is never ready). Sometimes a single "case study" can inform our practice in ways that benefit many students.

Once you have established baseline data, the next step is to develop and implement instructional activities designed to move students from where they are to where you want them to be, with respect to your learning targets. Although the work of instructional planning is intense and demanding, the more specific and clear your learning targets are, the easier this will be.

The Finish Line

How will we know when we get there? OK, the instruction/assessment process is really more like an outdoor track than a straight course; the finish line also marks the next starting point. Nonetheless, collecting data after a lesson is complete is crucial; otherwise, how will you know if the target was achieved? Fortunately, having a clearly written target makes the determination of relevant data straightforward. If my goal is to lose 15 pounds and I lost 8, my status is clear. I also have a decision to make (another two weeks of calorie counting or uncomfortably tight clothes). The same is true in the classroom. If your assessment data indicate that several of your students did not write paragraphs supporting identified character traits, you have a decision to make: address the issue by revisiting the learning target or move on with the expectation that the skill be will reinforced through upcoming instructional activities.

Seizing the Data

Schools and teachers are inundated with pressures from forces outside the realm of professional expertise, so it is critical for educators to develop comfort and proficiency in the use of data. Because teachers serve the interests of our students directly, we are most capable of determining the skills, knowledges, and dispositions that they will need in the future. Although state and federal standards provide guidelines for classroom learning targets, data provided by standardized assessments do little to promote the success of our youth—especially those most in need of support. If we do not use data to achieve our goals, we relinquish our professional responsibility to political leaders who will not hesitate to use data to achieve theirs. Classroom data—collected, analyzed, reported, and acted on by teachers—offer the possibility to enhance instructional effectiveness and, ultimately, may be the means to realize truly positive educational reform.

If we do not use data to achieve our goals, we relinquish our professional responsibility to political leaders who will not hesitate to use data to achieve theirs.

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NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Research in the Teaching of English.* In May 2013, the term of the present editors, Mark Dressman, Sarah McCarthey, and Paul Prior, will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received no later than **August 15, 2011.** Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters specifying financial support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Applicants are urged to explore with their administrators the feasibility of assuming the responsibilities of a journal editor. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the search committee. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee in February 2012 will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in August 2013. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be sent electronically to Kurt Austin, Publications Director, kaustin@ncte.org, or by mail to Kurt Austin, *Research in the Teaching of English* Editor Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

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Teaching Young Adult Literature

Acid-Washed Jeans, a Moussed-Out Mullet, and Eternity Cologne: The Challenges of Growing Up

It was 1987.

I was in eighth grade, and the Spring Fling dance was rocking the South Bonneville Junior High gym like it had never been rocked before.

My main objective up to that point had been to simply look good, and one glance in the mirror confirmed in my oh-so-tainted mind that I had accomplished this (think acid-washed jeans, a moussed-out mullet, and about nine sprays too many of Eternity cologne). But in the back of my mind, I knew that night had the chance to be something special, so as I walked through the green-and-yellow balloon archway leading into the gym, I challenged myself to step up my game and do something I never thought possible: I was going to ask Sarah Hinton to slow dance.

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And moments later, when Whitesnake's "Here I Go Again" erupted from the speakers, I knew it was on.

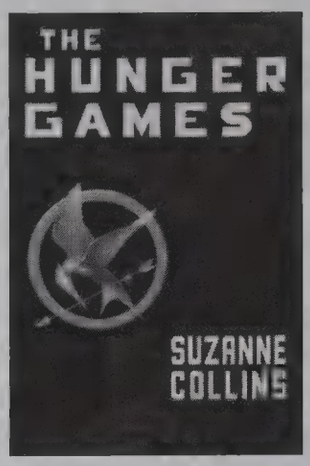
Challenges.

They've always been around, but it seems as if today's students face more of them than ever before, and unfortunately, they often are much larger in scale than simply deciding who they are going to ask to dance.

The good news is that the literature for today's adolescents has evolved in a way that tackles these issues head-on. Not only do they expose the challenges of life, they also provide teens with solutions and coping strategies for these inevitable "bumps in the road." Three novels that effectively address these tough-to-handle situations are Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games,* Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,* and William Golding's classic *Lord of the Flies.*

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins (grades 7+)

In this dystopian novel, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark



are selected to participate in the Hunger Games, a televised fight-to-the-death battle between geographical districts. Beyond the gripping storyline and action-filled plot, *The Hunger Games* uses a strong female protagonist to present a wide range of challenges, including physical, emotional, and mental battles.

As an introductory activity, bring in the weekly grocery ads and, in groups, let students decide what they would buy if given $100 *right now.* Next, have them share their lists and the logic behind each purchase. Then, after explaining the concept of rationing and nutrition (two challenges within the novel), have the students reevaluate and reshare their choices. Ideally (although not always) the list changes from favorites such as candy and soda to essentials such as canned fruit and bottled water. This activity is effective in that it forces students to look at the same issue

(spending $100 on groceries) from two different perspectives. The first list they create serves as what they *want.* The second list reflects what they *need.* It's a simple activity, yet the challenge of understanding want versus need is a crucial one, especially with today's "I need the latest and greatest" teen mentality.

Next, early in the novel, show students a map of the United States that you have divided into 13 "districts," reflecting the geographical districts from the novel. From here, break the class up into 13 groups, assigning each group to a district. Once divided, have students research both the strengths and weaknesses of their district, including geographic location, population, and available natural resources (to name a few). This could also make a productive link to a geography class, and for those really looking for a challenge, I'm sure there's a lesson connecting the 13 districts in the novel to the 13 original colonies in the United States.

The Hunger Games also offers a range of informal and formal writing opportunities. Students could write a chapter or letter from the perspective of one of the other minor characters at any point in the novel. This will help students reflect on unspoken challenges that each character confronts. Students could also write about the skills they would bring to the Hunger Games if they were selected. This assignment has the unique feature of allowing students the chance to share a talent with their classmates that they might not otherwise talk about. Regarding more formal writing, a paper analyzing the many similarities between today's reality television and the Hunger Games (and the consequences of this form of "entertainment") is ripe for the picking.

Finally, as a closing activity, allow students to have some fun by asking them to serve as director for the film version of the novel. In this role, students must decide what actors will play each of the major characters, which characters will be left out, where the movie will be filmed, and what five key scenes *must* be included in the film (see fig. 1). This activity can also be adapted to specific television shows where students link traits of the characters in the book to those on their favorite shows. You can't tell me your students won't be jumping over each other to explain how Katniss resembles Snooki or how Peeta has the same traits as the Situation (for all you *Jersey Shore* fans out there—you know who you are!). You will be amazed by how much effort and thought goes into this!

FIGURE 1. *The Hunger Games* Lesson

Lights! Camera! Action!

The Hunger Games . . . The Movie!

Tired of the same old directors creating the same old movies? Hollywood is looking for some fresh faces, and they just called you!

The Assignment

Your job is to create the lineup for the movie version of *The Hunger Games.* You must also select the five key scenes from the book that you *insist* be in the film version.

Character	Actor
Katniss	
Peeta	
Haymitch	
Gale	
Prim	
President Snow	
Effie	
Cinna	
Rue	
Caesar Flickerman	

Five key scenes and brief explanation of why they **must** be in the movie:

1.

2.

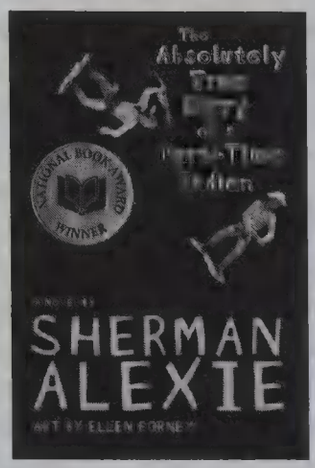
3.

4.

5.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie (grades 9+)

Arnold "Junior" Spirit lives on the Spokane Indian Reservation,



and after seeing his mother's name in one of his school books, he decides to transfer from his reservation school to Reardan High, the all-white school 20 miles away. On arriving and discovering that the only other Native American there is the school mascot, the challenge of keeping his identity begins. This is a funny and emotional novel (including some hilarious drawings), and students will connect with Junior as he battles to remain true to his past while striving to improve his future.

As a starter activity, write the phrase "Little pieces of joy in my life" (Alexi 176) on the board, and underneath it, write down a few things that make you happy—and please include your students on this list! After explaining your examples, have students create a list or, even better, have them come up to the board and write down an item or two that gives them joy. Anything from books to movies to songs to food is fair game, but challenge them to be specific in their selections; don't write *food*—write *Wendy's triple cheeseburger*! And let them know that repeats are not allowed; there are enough pieces of joy in the world to avoid repetition. You can make a great segue from this activity into a discussion about how even when life beats you up, there are still pieces of hope that often get overlooked (one of the themes in the novel).

Next, show the picture of Junior (page 57) and have the class explain the conflict he is going through based solely on what they see. Following this discussion, have students draw cartoon versions of themselves that illustrate two different sides of their personality or culture. This can include home versus school, sports versus academics, or alone versus with friends (to name a few). After they've drawn their pictures, give the students a chance to share and explain their self-portraits. This is an effective activity in that it allows students to understand that everyone has different layers to them. This is also a great chance for you to model that even *teachers* have lives outside of school. And if you're looking to add a little music to the unit, play Johnny Cash's "Ira Hayes" after this activity. It's a true narrative that perfectly illustrates the two sides of Native American Ira Hayes's heroic, yet sad, life.

Like *The Hunger Games,* there are writing activities related to the challenges within the story. The beauty of these questions is that they can be used at any point throughout the novel. And while I know it may go against your teaching instincts, it is OK to assign a paper before finishing the book! Possible writing prompts include the following:

1. How much should a person's responsibility to family or community overshadow individual goals?
2. How do your race, class, culture, and gender determine the type of person you are or will become?
3. Junior leaves the reservation to get a better education. Discuss a tough decision you made and how it affected you.

Finally, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* would be a perfect link with an American history class where Native American experiences are studied. Topics for discussion might include life on a reservation, reservation health and education statistics, and why reservations were created in the first place. If there are history teachers in your school who are looking to incorporate more literacy into their classes, this would be a great choice. Why should English teachers have all the fun?

Lord of the Flies by William Golding (grades 8+)

After their plane crashes on an island, a group of young boys is forced to work together to survive. But as time passes, the challenge of remaining civilized gives way to the beast that lives inside

us all, and the struggle for power and survival begins. The book is filled with various conflicts, and today's teens will connect with the internal battles between right and wrong that Ralph, Jack, Piggy, and the rest of the boys endure.

If your students are like mine, they pretty much think they know everything about everything. Because of this, I like to start my *Lord of the Flies* unit off with an outdoor survival test. There are a lot of these online, some more complex than others, but I like to keep it simple by sticking to some pretty basic questions (see fig. 2). This activity connects with both the setting and the plot of the novel in a much more engaging manner than simply doing a book talk or introduction of the story. Plus, I'm always amazed at how much my students know about this kind of thing.

In addition to the challenges faced within the story, *Lord of the Flies* also is a great tool for helping to solidify students' understanding of symbolism. Pretty much *everything* in this novel has a deeper meaning, and to support this, I have students create a symbolism log where they keep track of what the people, objects, or events from the novel represent. To support various learning strategies, students can create visual representations, written explanations, or a combination of both. Another option that stresses the symbolism in the story can be found by going to the *Lord of the Flies* Educational Productions website for the Nobel Prize (http://nobelprize.org/educational/literature/golding/) for an interactive review of the symbols and motifs used throughout the novel. This review can be effectively implemented for both small- and large-group reviews.

Finally, as a closing activity, the conflicts presented in the story, including character-versus-self and character-versus-nature, align perfectly with those presented in Tom Hanks's *Cast Away*. Specifically, the physical and mental struggles faced in both stories make for an ideal Venn diagram project/discussion. And if showing full-length movies isn't your thing, there's always "Das Bus," *The Simpsons* episode from the ninth season based on the novel.

Connecting Books with Contemporary Teens

While it's true that most teens won't ever fight 'til the death, be the only Native American at school, or get marooned on an island, they do know what it means to face challenges on a daily basis. Each of the above novels will help adolescents, when faced

FIGURE 2. Survival Quiz

Houston, We Have a Problem

A Survival Quiz

1. Your airliner has crashed in the mountains. You're one of several survivors. You should:
   a. Climb to the top of the nearest mountain and build a signal fire
   b. Make short trips; a road may be nearby
   c. Stay put and wait for rescue
2. It's cold and you have no fire. To keep warm, you should:
   a. Remain motionless to conserve energy
   b. Exercise vigorously
   c. Cover your head
3. You suspect that searchers may be in the woods looking for you. You should:
   a. Scream several times
   b. Build a fire and make smoke signals
   c. Try to find your way toward the rescue party
4. A search plane flies overhead. To attract a plane's attention, you should:
   a. Use the mirror in your compact as a signal
   b. Wave your most colorful piece of clothing
   c. Climb to the top of a tree
5. Your airliner has crashed in deep snow and the temperature is below zero. The warmest place you can be is:
   a. In the plane's broken fuselage
   b. Under the snow
   c. Inside a tent made of seat cushions and parachutes
6. You suspect it may be many days before you're found. Your greatest concern is:
   a. Lack of food
   b. Lack of water
   c. Lack of shelter

Answer Key to Survival Quiz:

1. C (It's big and can be seen from above.)
2. C (Most of your body heat is lost through your head.)
3. A (It gets the attention of the searchers.)
4. A (It will catch the pilot's eye.)
5. B (It's about 32 degrees, well above the surrounding negative temperature.)
6. B (You can only last four to five days without water.)

with the inevitable struggles that occur during the teen years, to better understand how to manage these difficulties that life often throws our way.

Oh, and for those of you wondering what happened with Sarah Hinton, my eighth-grade would-be paramour, here's the short (yet still slightly painful) version.

Alan Spears: that's what happened.

By the time I had meandered my way across the dance floor to make my move, he had already shuffled Sarah off to the dance floor.

In a perfect world, this would be the part where I told you that even though I was down, I wasn't out. And then I'd probably tell you that on the *very next* slow song, I walked right up to her and finally got my dance. But I didn't.

In fact, I never got that dance—Sarah moved away at the end of that school year (insert sigh here). Besides, I was waiting for *that* song on *that* night with *that* girl—you can't re-create that kind of thing!

Challenges.

Sometimes you get the best of them, other times they get the best of you. But like Junior says, when the bad times come, you just have to think of "those little pieces of joy" and just keep plowing forward.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go put on my acid-washed jeans.

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Standardization, in the Spirit of William Blake

Testmaker, testmaker,
Dost thou know who made thee?
Funny, one of the words on the test
Was widget.
Widget!
Which tells me that thou, testmaker,
Knowest naught of irony

Thou a testmaker and I a widget
We are called by . . . well, money and oneness, I
suppose
Or by no name
By which ~~we~~ may reconcile

Testmaker, testmaker,
Who gave thee power and bid thee standard
O'er the future
Gave thee a license
A measure
By which we may reconcile

Gave thee knowledge, which to test
Didst he who made the curriculum make thee?
Or did thou make he,
Who made the comprehensive plan?

School a "vale" I knowest not
A community fraught with equivalence
A process by which I sink, or slake
A society under surveillance

Testmaker, testmaker, dost thou know who made thee?
Testmaker, testmaker, I'll tell thee . . .
That is, I'd tell thee if I didn't have to measure
Standard 4.2.36.22.33253, my vocation.

Testmaker, testmaker,
I quit thee,
I quit thee.

—Corey Rose

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Corey Rose taught English in a juvenile correctional facility in Florida. His curricular designs feature ethics-based teaching built around thematic units. He believes that young adults often exercise bad judgment not because of "poor" ethics, but because they have not yet constructed *any* personal system of ethics. Themes that arise in his class often include belief, identity, belonging, and choice. Email him at crose319@gmail.com.

Namaste: A Spiritual Approach to Grading

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The reason why one is so vastly more fortunate to be a teacher of English, versus the uncapitalized subjects, is the grading. Yes, the grading. It's a burden, it's a bugaboo, it's a bear. It's the slayer of weekends. As Macbeth's Gaelic teacher said, it doth murder sleep. And yet, if we are lucky enough to work in a district that does not overwhelm us with students, it is a source of lightness and rejuvenation.

Not always. There are plenty of times when I would echo poet Marianne Moore: "I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle" (36). Grading can get in the way—of my family, of my sanity, of my students' education. And, no matter with what enthusiasm I approach a stack of essays, I might get beaten down by it. Moore was talking about our subject, not our job, but I'll continue the quote: "however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in / it after all, a place for the genuine."

When I find myself in that place for the genuine, that's when I love my job. The grading of an individual essay is an occasion, a moment cut out from the regular march of time, an event of heightened consciousness. And though it's a public act, it's intensely private. I explain it to my students this way: It's a meeting of minds. I expect them to dig into their hearts and to grope outward into the unknown world in every essay. And, as a reader, I expect the same of myself. What makes writing a *rite* is this commitment of reader and writer to find each other in a place for the genuine.

Sometimes there is nothing genuine in an essay. The whole damn thing might have been cut and pasted from cheateressays.com. Or the students might be too frightened, too tired, or too lazy to access their own authenticity. But with good planning and good luck, these problems can be minimized. More likely impediments are on our side of the red pen: our own fear, fatigue, and laziness.

The solution isn't coffee, though that might help. Rather, we, like many of our students, may need an attitude adjustment. For those who love tinkering with car engines, that is a self-energizing activity. The attitude with which they approach the work refreshes them psychically. But other people groan when they pop the hood and curse under their breath as they gaze down at the old clunker. The chore depletes energy. With grading, the trick is to acquire that attitude that makes it energy-producing.

My trick is to take a moment before I begin a stack of essays and say, quietly, *Namaste.*

It's an old Sanskrit word and a traditional Hindu greeting: literally, "I bow to you." But many writers in English, especially those of a spiritual bent, get a little carried away, and maybe something gets *found* in translation. One yoga teacher offered: "That which is sacred within me salutes that which is sacred within you." It's a lovely sentiment, and perhaps for some Hindus, that *is* the deep power of the word. In any case, it works for me when I modify it as a pre-grading mantra: "That which is genuine within me, may it find that which is genuine within your essay."

Our assignments can be obstacles. If we make no invitation to the genuine, the student will either be obediently banal or will be genuine in a destructive way. Either way, we lose—the grading is misery.

Formulae can have the same numbing effect. While boilerplates such as the five-paragraph essay

may sometimes be unavoidable, and occasionally even useful, for our own sakes we have to minimize such institutionalized deadness. If the structure we force students into is a cliché, we shouldn't expect much originality.

Then there's our method of grading. Rubrics have their place, but it isn't a genuine one. They offer a tempting shortcut—and bypass the rougher, higher ground where minds can meet. By taking an essay as the sum of its parts, the rubric denies the essential mystery of any sincere piece of writing. I use rubrics for one-dimensional assignments that need a quick grade rather than a meaningful response—presentations, posters, etc.

Rubrics provide the comforting illusion of objectivity. But we can't escape our subjectivity. And we shouldn't commence our grading with the lie that we can. No student falls for it, even if we convince ourselves. We must continually inventory ourselves for favoritism, faulty assumptions, and sloppy thinking. When we make a mistake, we must promptly admit it, fix it if we can, and learn from it. But we must accept our subjectivity. There's no other route to the genuine.

Then there's consistency, another bugaboo. In "Self-Reliance," Ralph Waldo Emerson called it "the hobgoblin of little minds . . . . With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do" (24). I may not be a great soul, but I would like to grade soulfully. And this means, in effect, that I am open to be changed by a piece of writing. If the old proverb "You can never step into the same river twice" is correct, then we will just have to admit: Two essays can never be graded by the same teacher.

We encourage our student-writers to take risks. Should we not take our own advice—and take risks in our grading? It might sound shocking at first. But if we don't, aren't we assuming that we've already reached some promised land of master teacher perfection? That we don't need to grow? That the essay is a form without mystery? That the art of writing is a measurable, limited field of knowledge—a spreadsheet of words—and that we have the algorithm for converting it into a point value?

I must admit that a certain selfishness underlies this approach to grading. I believe that I have the basic human right to enjoy my work. I also believe that teacher and student are embarked on a joint venture, and teachers lead not so much by knowing the way, but by being unafraid of the dark.

There's a certain amount of idealism here, surely. I don't live up to it all the time, maybe not half the time, but it's what I always strive for. It's the ideal I aspire to, and the sincerity of the labor is all I have to offer. That's hard enough, anyway. Even now, as I do what is for me the pleasurable task of tinkering with my own writing, I'm procrastinating from a stack of essays.

But I *will* get to it. And I will start by taking a moment for my word.

Namaste. The word itself bows to us across the millennia and across the curving earth. The suffix, *te,* will be a familiar object to you if you know Spanish or French. It means "you," in the familiar form, as direct object. It's the long-lost twin sister of Shakespeare's *thee.* The Indo-Europeans—that Stone Age people we know only by the linguistic record—carried this steadfast syllable, always the familiar, sometimes the object, and it became *tu* in Urdu, Gaelic, and Latin, *toe* in Farsi, *ti* in Russian and Welsh. Language is full of such hidden connections, and who knows what doors and passages are still secret from us. Students, when they write, inhabit this ancient and amorphous structure that is ever clumped, unclumped, and reclumped together by the collective endeavor of human consciousness. They invite us in. How can we turn them down?

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Education That Hurts Society

(for J.B.[1] and his Fabulous Flames)

If public education
In this white supremacist nation
Is, at best,
Indoctrination and,
At worst,
Subjugation—
The modern day plantation
Where both house and field
Succumb to the power
That Massa wields—
Then how's it feel
To be a teacher?
Can you reach her
Or him?
Is it a sin
To take a paycheck
From a place
That passes judgment
(one hopes unconsciously)
Based on race
Or sex
Or—shout out to all you privileged deniers—
Class?
You can't really tell
The Powers That Be
To kiss your ass
Or go to hell
For you have mouths to feed
So you let your stomach bleed
And axe yourself
Whachyagon' do, white boy?
Remain a capitalist toy?
Or find some huevos
Follow your joy
Take a deep breath
Spit some real hip hop
And don't stop
Or even stall
'Til you get those students
Out the hall
Into the classroom
Where you'll make their brains zoom
Take them to the stratosphere
Turn them onto Shakespeare
Empower them to use words to conquer fear
Teach them about some history
That TPTB want to remain a mystery?
. . . Or maybe
You'll just toss
And turn
At night
Crawl out
Your bed
And write
A rhyme
Or two
To placate you
Then drop
To your knees
And pray to your Creator
For the strength to make it through
Another day
Know what I mean?
Know what I'm trying to say?

—Fred W. Schenck

1. James Baldwin

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Fred W. Schenck teaches English at Evanston Township High School in Evanston, Illinois. He writes, "The dedication 'for J.B. and his Fabulous Flames' is my nod to Mr. Baldwin and the volume *The Fire Next Time*. His letter to his nephew, 'My Dungeon Shook,' is one of those seminal pieces that shook me from the sleep of my unconscious racism, my white privilege." Email him at schenckf@yahoo.com.

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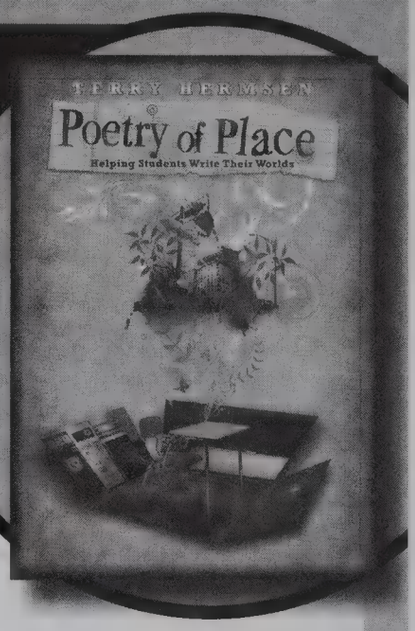

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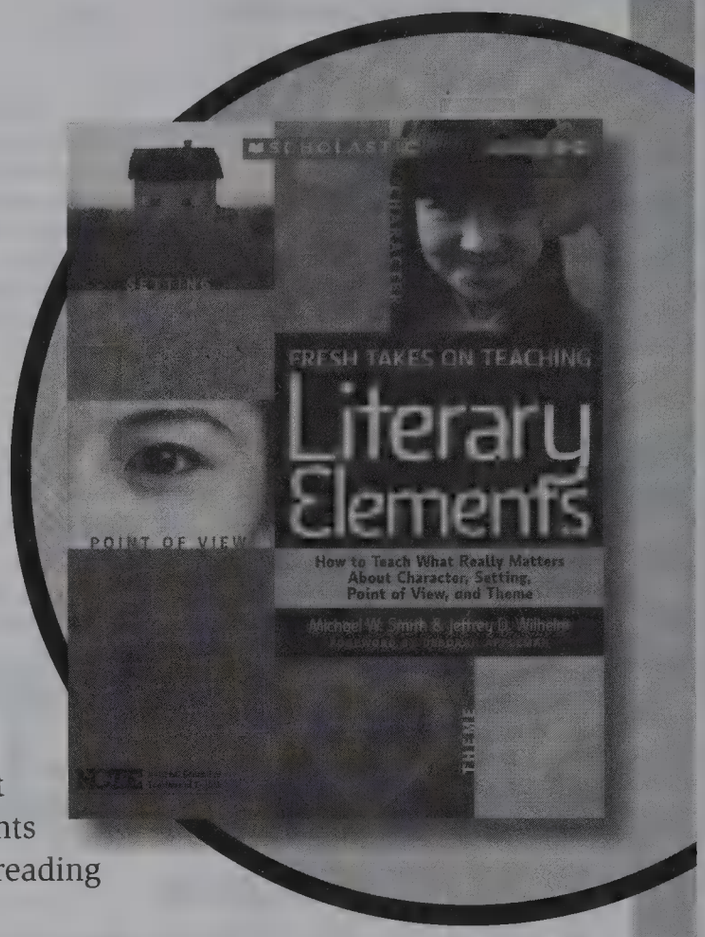

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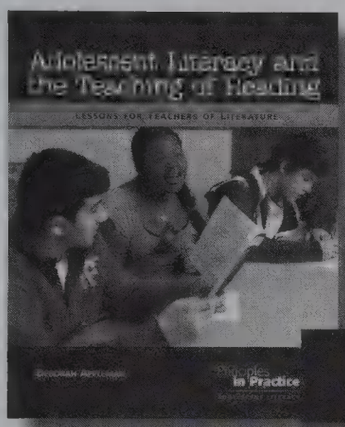

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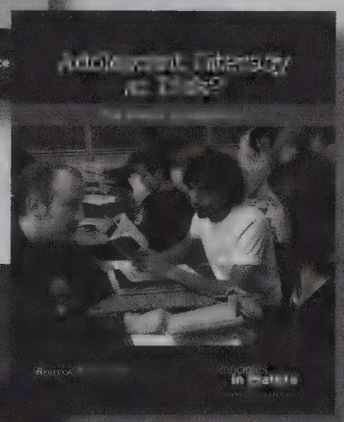

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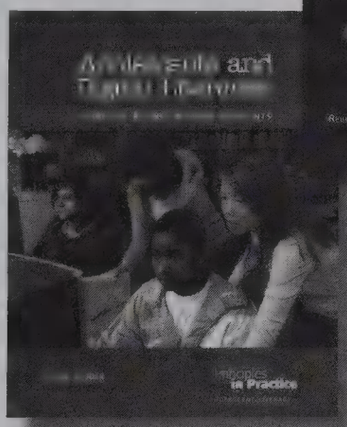

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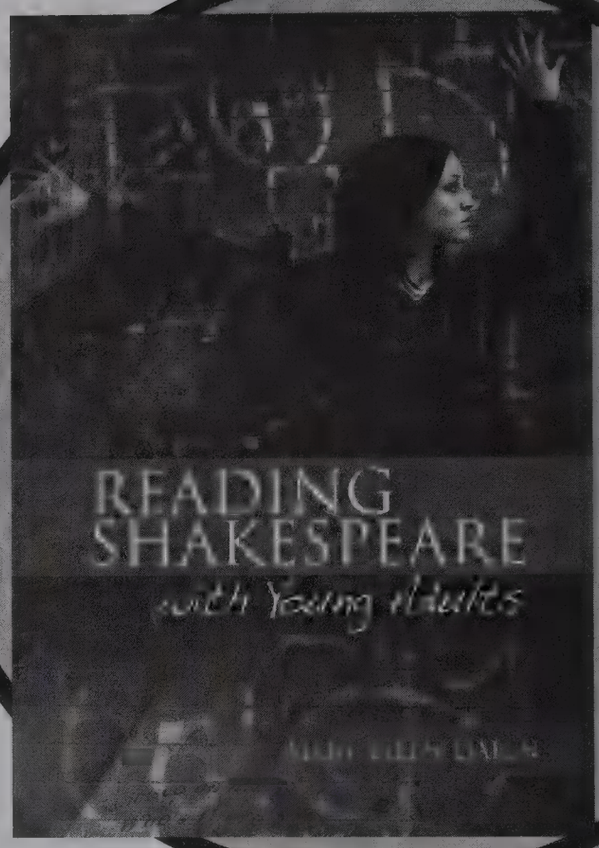
NCTE PRESENTS...

Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults

Mary Ellen Dakin



Shakespeare? *Really?*

Although the works of William Shakespeare are universally taught in high schools, many students have a similar reaction when confronted with the difficult task of reading Shakespeare for the first time.

In *Reading Shakespeare with Young Adults,* Mary Ellen Dakin seeks to help teachers better understand not just *how* to teach the Bard's work, but also *why*.

By celebrating the collaborative reading of Shakespeare's plays, Dakin explores different methods for getting students engaged—and *excited*—about the texts as they learn to construct meaning from Shakespeare's sixteenth-century language and connect it to their twenty-first-century lives.

Filled with teacher-tested classroom activities, this book draws on often-taught plays, including:

- *Hamlet*
- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *Macbeth*
- *Julius Caesar*
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The ideas and strategies presented here are designed to be used with any of the Bard's plays and are intended to help all populations of students—mainstream, minority, bilingual, advanced, at-risk, etc.

In the crucible that is the modern American classroom, Shakespeare is the great equalizer. Even after hundreds of years, his works are new and strange to us all.

So, yes, Shakespeare. Really!

233 pp. 2009. Grades 9–12. ISBN 978-0-8141-3904-2.

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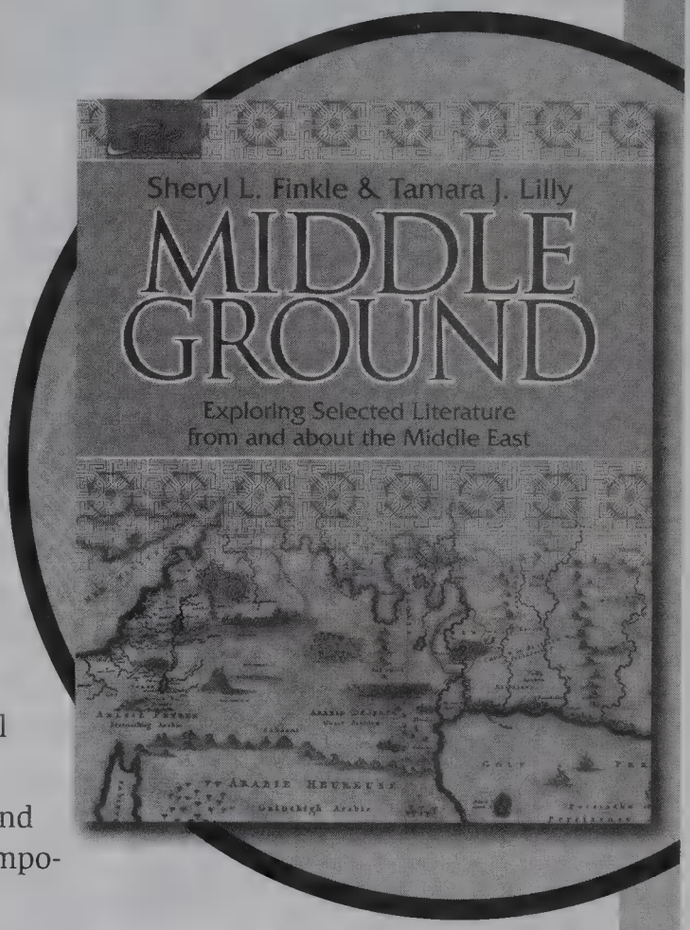
NCTE PRESENTS...

Middle Ground

Exploring Selected Literature from and about the Middle East

Sheryl L. Finkle and Tamara J. Lilly



For years, literature from and about the Middle East has largely been missing from middle and high school curricula. Changing demographics and global citizenship necessitate a better understanding of Middle Eastern history, culture, and literature.

Recognizing this need, veteran teachers Sheryl L. Finkle and Tamara J. Lilly offer a comprehensive review of the theory and practice of teaching Middle Eastern literature. In this book, they:

- Review principles of multicultural/cross-cultural pedagogy
- Describe principles for selecting quality texts and explain the importance of teaching both contemporary and ancient literature of the region
- Illustrate how using these texts can engage young readers and help develop their language and literacy skills
- Provide activities, lessons, and materials for various print and nonprint texts, including books such as *Habibi, The Kite Runner,* and *Behind the Burqa: Our Life in Afghanistan and How We Escaped to Freedom* and the films *Osama* and *Reel Bad Arabs.*

Studying literature from and about the Middle East not only enables students to gain a deeper understanding of the world around them but also allows them to develop crucial critical thinking and literacy skills that can be applied outside the English classroom.

149 pp. 2008. Grades 6–12. ISBN 978-0-8141-3161-9. Theory & Research Into Practice series.

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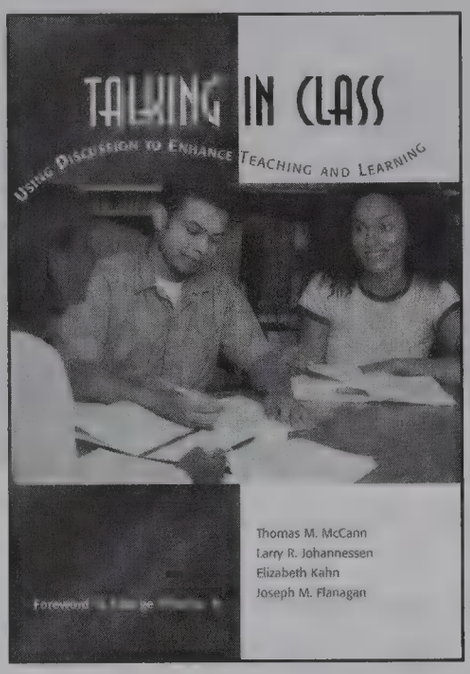
NCTE Presents...

Talking in Class

Using Discussion to Enhance Teaching and Learning

Thomas M. McCann, Larry R. Johannessen, Elizabeth Kahn, and Joseph M. Flanagan



"The authors have brought their combined seventy-plus years of classroom experience to bear on making this book an important and delightful read. . . . [I]f you are concerned with good discussion in your classes, you will want to try some of the many fascinating, surefire materials and activities included. The book is a must-read for every teacher, neophyte or pro, concerned with discussion, whatever the subject matter."

-George Hillocks, Jr., Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago

Experienced teachers know—and new teachers quickly learn—how challenging it is to spark and sustain effective classroom discussions. How can we avoid asking leading questions that make students try to read our minds for a "correct" answer? How can we foster meaningful, focused conversation that produces deeper insights into a specific work or topic?

Talking in Class guides readers in developing skills that promote and facilitate *authentic* discussion within the English language arts classroom. Speaking from their own classroom experience, the authors introduce some basic considerations for planning, managing, and evaluating large-group and small-group discussions. Examples of both instructional activities and classroom practices illustrate the ways that discussion prepares students for subsequent learning, specifically in connection to writing and to the reading and interpretation of literature.

The authors also explore how discussion can

- connect many phases and components of the curriculum;
- promote and support inquiry and critical thinking;
- incorporate current, popular technologies, such as blogs and discussion boards;
- and connect students to issues that are important to them and to the broader world of thinkers.

230 pp. 2006. Grades 9–12. ISBN 0-8141-5001-2.

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www.rurallit.org

Our Purpose

Reinvigorating life and learning in the American countryside

Out of print for decades, and long-since discarded from all but research university libraries, wonderful works of literature are simply unavailable. The Rural Literature Initiative seeks strategies for building demand for rural literature in rural schools and colleges such that academic and university presses can put much of this literature back into print or, short of this, that digitized collections might be created.

The "rural literature initiative" was developed by a small group of educators and researchers committed to the reinvigoration of American rural life. Recognizing that democracy hinges on the ability of citizens to play a political role with their lives, and that it is, and has always been, rural America where that necessary condition is optimized, this group hopes that this initiative will make a contribution to reinvigorating life and learning in the American countryside.

Ways to Get Involved

Build the Authors List

The list found on our Authors page is merely a beginning. We are seeking input from our readers regarding current or out-of-print rural authors.

Endangered Literature Campaign

Commit to reviving student understanding of the richness of rural literature in your classroom. Share current or past experiences of ways you use rural literature with your K-12 or college-level students or commit to adding readings from rural authors to your core curriculum. We will compile details provided by our readers and share frameworks for other educators who hope to increase student exposure to diverse forms of rural literature.

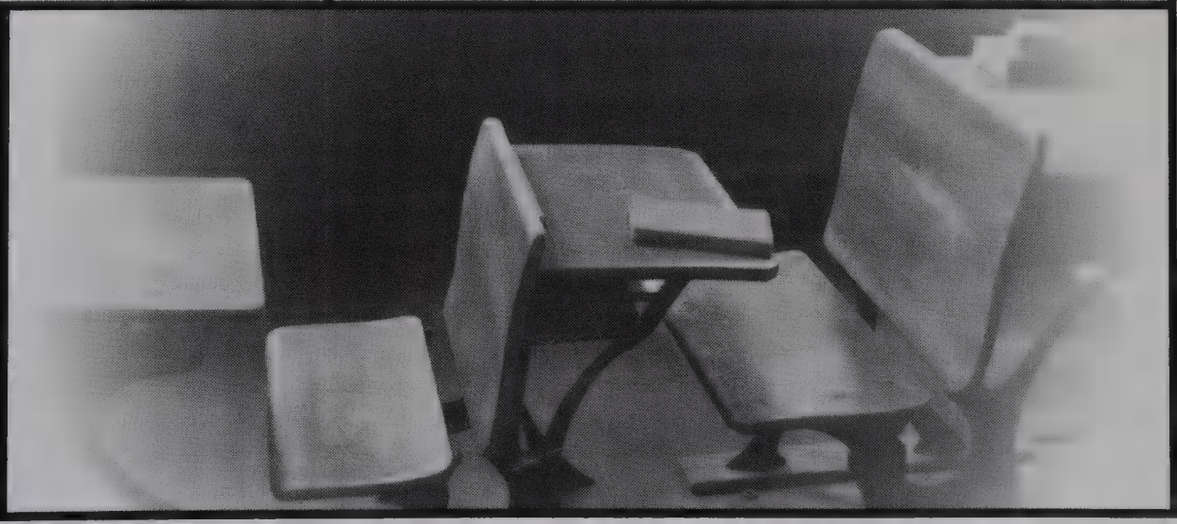
Top Ten

Share your top ten list of America's greatest rural literature. We will share reader suggestions on our website.

Project Director
Paul Theobald

Web Address
http://www.rurallit.org

Email Address
rurallit@yahoo.com



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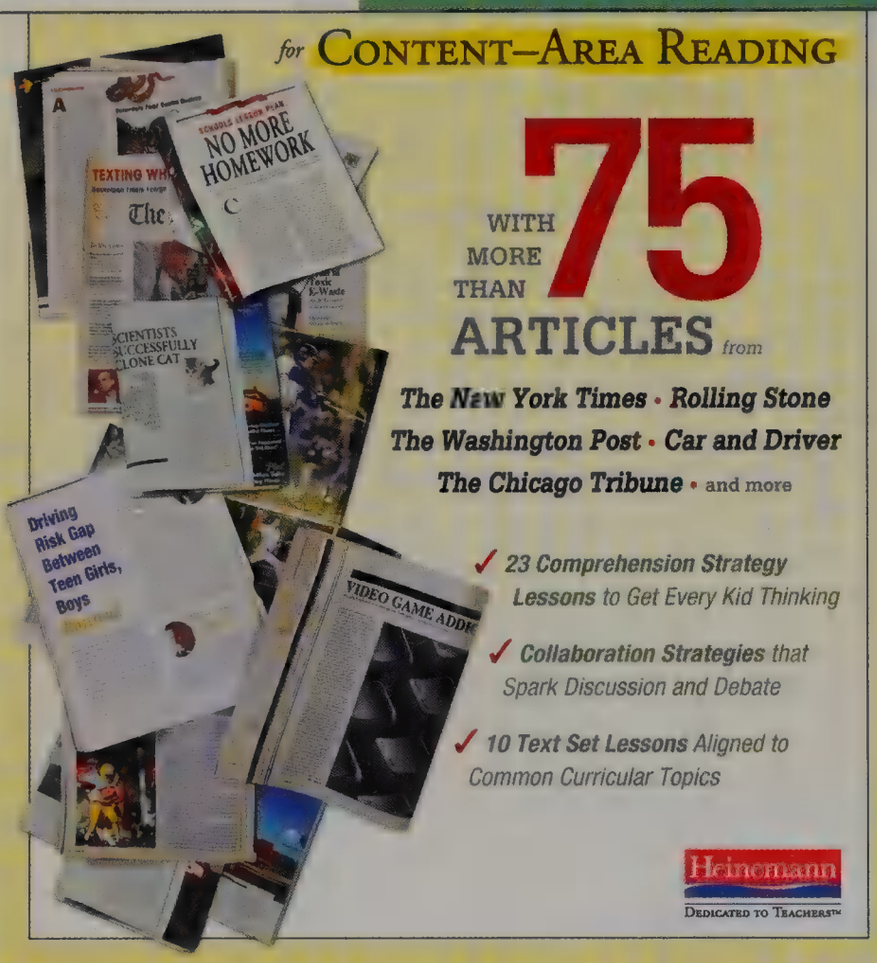

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Grades 6–12 / 978-0-325-03087-6 / 2011 / 280pp / $29.50

In the same teacher-friendly, classroom-wise voices that made *Subjects Matter* and *Content-Area Writing* bestsellers, Daniels and Steineke prove that with the right materials and the right lessons, you can turn your kids into much better readers in your subject field *and* address the new Common Core State Standards. Watch what happens when you give your kids a combination of **interesting texts,** instruction in **smart-reader strategies**, and an explicit understanding of **good discussion skills**. Meeting the standards has never been so much fun.

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